

Beginnings to A Political Philosophy of International Development: Epistemology and the  
Limits of Reason

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Arts in European Studies  
at the University of Canterbury

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University of Canterbury Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha

2018

## Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the National Centre for Research on Europe at the University of Canterbury for allowing me the freedom and flexibility to pursue my academic passions. The academic and financial support the Centre has provided me has allowed me to reach a level of academic study I could not have achieved otherwise. I will always be grateful for that.

To my family, there are no words. I could never express fully the immensity of my love and thanks for you all, but I thank you anyway. We march forward now. I know you will be proud that I have completed this project.

To my two best friends who have been my family for the past one and a half years. You probably do not know how much I have valued and benefited from your presence. This project will always remind me of our time together.

To my girl, thank you for coming into my life when you did. You make me want to do, and be, better. That feeling is a blessing and I am thankful for you.

To my brother, you have given me this. I will take you wherever I go.

*Kua taka iho tōku ao  
I rumakina e te pō  
Nā te ringa kaha o Aituā  
I tāmāte, I hē, I mauāhara tōku wairua  
Tōu mauri e tama kua wehe ai  
Auē te pāpōuri, auē te mamae*

*Heoi, ehara māu tēnei taumahatanga e kawē  
I runga I te rangimarie kē  
Tukua to wairua kia rere ake  
Waiho atu tēnei ao kia tau rā āno ki te rangi  
Kua whakaritengia ngā karakia  
Ināianeī, mā ngā Atua e tiaki.*

*My world has fallen  
It was swallowed by the night  
'Tis the mighty hand of death that has depressed and tainted my spirit  
And made it hateful  
Your vital force dear brother is no more  
O the sadness and the pain*

*But this burden is not yours to bear  
Instead, allow your spirit to travel unencumbered  
Leave this world and settle finally in heaven  
Our rituals have been performed  
Now you will reside in the care of the Gods.*

Abstract:

This Thesis brings a philosophical perspective to the study of international development. It suggests that the debates which characterize international development discourse can be usefully understood at the level of underlying epistemological assumptions. The philosophical schools considered are liberalism and postmodernism. The argument made is that the nature of many disagreements in international development discourse exist not at the level of practice and detail, but at the level of epistemological starting points.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction:

The etymology of the word development points toward a definition of the term meaning something close to “a gradual unfolding, a full working out or disclosure of the details of something;” or “advancement through progressive stages.”; or in terms of Property, a sense of “bringing out the latent possibilities” for use or profit (Development, n.d). These definitions imply direction, but they make no moral judgement about where that direction leads. It is not by necessity that the idea of development should be tied to or associated with positive connotations. Things that are bad or evil can equally be said to be capable of developing, unfolding, expanding, growing or advancing through progressive stages. The optimism or implicit progress-in-the-direction-of-the-good that pervades much modern international development discourse then, betrays the existence of an underlying set of assumptions which provide content to both the idea of progress, and the idea of good. The central question to be addressed in this thesis is ‘What are the underlying assumptions which inform international development theories?’

In the immediate post-world war 2 period these concepts were provided content by the respective ideological blocs of the liberal capitalist West and the communist Soviet Union. The liberal vision eventually came to dominate, and the major international institutions that exist today are a result of this fact. Development, as it is institutionalized in international relations (IR), and as it is constructed discursively, has borne the mark of its liberal philosophical origins since WW2, and especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, since the 1980s a significant critique of the liberal vision for development has become prominent both in academia in the form of ‘post-development’ discourse (Escobar, 1995; Sachs, 1992; Crush, 1995; Alvares, 1992; Watts, 1995; Ziai, 2004) and on the ground in many developing nations in the form of various social movements (Hettne, 1995; Lehmann, 1990; Corbridge, 1991; Escobar, 1995; Esteva, Prakash, & Shiva, 2014). This critique, in combination with other factors such as the economic and political rise of significant non-Western state actors e.g. China, India, Russia and Brazil has seen a renewed emphasis on the state as the most significant engine of development and an overall questioning of the viability of a liberal international order (Tanzi, 2011; McKay, 2012, p. 76; Bremmer 2010; Ikenberry, 2008; Fukuyama, 2017)

An argument presented in this thesis is that at its core, this critique and questioning of liberalism can be usefully understood at the level of underlying epistemological assumptions.

In this thesis the epistemological assumptions of two distinct philosophical schools, liberalism and what will be referred to as postmodernism, are considered.

The philosophy of liberalism has its origins in the enlightenment period in Western Europe beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It champions the virtues of reason, science and individual liberty as the primary means to guide action and achieve progress. Despite its widespread application in the West and beyond, liberalism and enlightenment values have always had their detractors and critics. Beginning with Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), a distinct intellectual strain has existed alongside liberalism from its inception to the present. This strain is given the label postmodernism in this thesis. Central to the postmodern approach is a focus on the mediating influence of unequal power relations in human affairs and the essential contingency of knowledge and social orders.

Liberalism's champions connect it with political stability, technological and scientific achievement as well as liberation and emancipation. Its critics point out its historical connection with colonialism, as well as the cultural and environmental destruction caused by its universalising and mechanistic view of social relations. Postmodern philosophy is recognized for its non-dogmatic approach to truth, its focus on the mediating influence of power relations in human affairs and its subsequent emancipatory potential. Critics of postmodern philosophy point to its epistemic and moral relativism and its one-sided focus on the deconstruction rather than construction of knowledge. Postmodernism is also critiqued on the basis of its shared intellectual lineage with ideas inspirational to left and right wing political extremism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including both Soviet communism and Nazi national socialism.

This thesis seeks to make explicit the different fundamental assumptions of both liberalism and postmodernism as well as how these assumptions produce markedly different prescriptions for both the study and practice of international development. Liberalism and Postmodernism will be treated as competing philosophies of development. A philosophy of development should be understood as a set of philosophic beliefs and assumptions which inform the holder's conception of human agency, knowledge production and normative ideas concerning the nature of a 'developed' society. To study the philosophy of development is to study how philosophical beliefs and fundamental assumptions influence and shape



- a) Ideas about what constitutes, or should constitute, the nature of a developed society.
- b) Strategies for pursuing these ideas in the world.

The contribution this thesis makes to the development literature is its attempt to articulate clearly the philosophical assumptions which underlay much development thinking. By adding a philosophical perspective to the understanding of international development, it is possible to see with greater clarity the roots of the debates which characterize it. Without this philosophical perspective, understanding the agreements and disagreements that occur at the intellectual level as well as the successes and failures at the practical level becomes much more difficult. Scholars, politicians, NGO's, development practitioners and individuals themselves all run the risk of talking past one another. International development discourse has once again converged on the centrality of the state as the most significant factor in development (). But even this apparent convergence still conceals drastically different understandings of what the role of the state should be. This thesis provides a framework for understanding these differences at least insofar as they relate to the important debate between liberalism and postmodernism.

#### Structure of the Thesis:

Chapter Two of this thesis deals with the concept of development itself, specifically in the context of what we can understand today as constituting an institutionalized international development discourse. It begins by describing the origins of international development discourse in the post-World War 2 (WW2) period, making reference to the geo-political context which surrounded it. It describes the way in which development thought and practice occurs not in an evolutionary manner, but rather revolves around certain key tensions. In the course of this discussion it is argued that the liberal philosophy of development which has guided thought and action in the West since WW2 has become increasingly vulnerable to critiques by scholars in the humanities operating out of a postmodern philosophical tradition. These scholars disagree with the idea that it is possible to acquire objective knowledge upon which universal value judgements can be made. In response to this, the argument of this thesis is that a discussion of these critiques needs to be conducted at the level of basic epistemological assumptions, and that the root of these disagreements concerns the nature of

knowledge itself. Of crucial importance is the relationship between knowledge and action. Engaging in a project of international development implies that it is possible to formulate knowledge about what development is, and then apply it in the world to achieve desired results. As will be shown, disagreements at the first stage (i.e. the nature of knowledge) have significant effects on the way in which development is understood both as a concept and as an institution. It is this idea which sets the stage for the project of the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter 3 is an exploration of both the liberal and postmodern schools, both of which have provided epistemological foundations for the study and pursuit of international development up to this point in time. The section consists of two parts, allowing each school of thought to be dealt with on its own. Liberalism is the subject of part one, and postmodernism of part two. Each part follows a similar structure. First, the ideas of several significant philosophers from each tradition are outlined. This is then followed by a section which distils the ideas of these philosophers into a set of fundamental beliefs and assumptions which, it is argued, allow for their grouping within a common school. The final component of these analyses is a section which relates the identified beliefs and assumptions back to international development discourse.

The central conclusion that is drawn as a result of the analysis in this thesis is that the nature of many disagreements in international development discourse exist not at the level of practice and detail, but at the level of epistemological starting points.

### **Delimitations:**

Before proceeding, a few comments on the scope of this study are in order. In this thesis a philosophical perspective is brought to bear on international development discourse by considering the philosophical assumptions of two distinct intellectual strains, liberalism and postmodernism. It is no small task to engage with, understand and articulate the various ideas of the many great philosophers which have contributed to the development of these two schools of thought. It should be noted that a full, or even more thorough, account of these two intellectual strains would not have been possible given the scope of this thesis. This thesis has tried to manage the dual requirement of breadth and depth of analysis, and so there should be no assumption made that the accounts of liberal and postmodern philosophy presented in this thesis are by any means exhaustive. That said, the assumptions identified at the end of each account are intended to be extrapolations of a more general

current of thought that will have applicability beyond the work of the scholars mentioned in this thesis.

It should also be noted that the focus on liberalism and postmodernism excludes many other philosophical perspectives that may have useful insights for the study and practice of international development. Philosophies dealing with moral cosmopolitanism in particular may seem to be a rather odd exclusion from a study of international development. The reason for this exclusion is that there is something important about the relationship between liberalism and postmodernism that needs to be addressed before other philosophies, moral cosmopolitanism included, can prove useful. The main point of disagreement between liberalism and postmodernism concerns the nature of knowledge itself. Postmodernism calls into question the ability of humans to develop objective knowledge about the world which can be used to orient and guide behaviour. This is particularly true in the case of moral values. As will be shown later in this thesis, the postmodern conception of knowledge and morality is that both are essentially contingent and depend solely on the particularities of different cultural milieu. In other words, all epistemological and moral interpretations of the world are contingent and are therefore not universal. Advancing moral cosmopolitanism as a framework for understanding international development without first coming to terms with the postmodern critique of universalism leaves it on unsteady philosophical ground and vulnerable to accusations of cultural and epistemic imperialism.

Liberalism has been included alongside postmodernism in this thesis because of the fact that the intellectual strain which constitutes postmodern thought can be seen as a reaction and critique of enlightenment philosophy - the birthplace of liberalism. Liberalism's ethical individualism, its focus on reason and knowledge production and its deep connection with post-WW2 development theory and practice makes it an important part of the overarching history of international development. Postmodernism and its rejection of enlightenment philosophy as well as its influence on post-development discourse forms another important part of this history. It is for this reason that the scope of this thesis has been limited to a consideration of only liberal and postmodern philosophy.

# CHAPTER TWO

## What is Development?

There is now an accepted practice in IR that sees both sovereign nations and multilateral bodies taking some, even if it is only a very small amount, of the responsibility for the development of other nations and their people. An explanation of how and why this has occurred, as well as what its implications are for the future is not obvious. Morally, it would appear admirable that such an institution has arisen in amongst the often-conflictual relations between different peoples. To have a moral unity even at the level of the nation state has been a magnificent achievement, and an achievement not universally won. To have a recognized international norm that encourages cooperation between political and social actors of all different forms, in pursuit of the betterment of the human condition as a whole, is undoubtedly a great achievement. The fact of its existence, however, tells us nothing about the underlying forces and motivations that drive it, the legitimacy of its stated objectives, or the effectiveness of its methods and political prescriptions. Its moral character, therefore, should only be judged once these aspects of its existence have been subjected to thorough scrutiny. To arrive at an agreement on what constitutes the 'betterment' of the human condition is no small task. The moral and the political inevitably become intertwined, and it is for this reason that this thesis makes an effort to trace the ideas that now permeate international development discourse back to their philosophical origins.

Before this can be done however, it would be wise to get to know this institution in greater detail. This chapter provides an overview of the origins and historical trajectory of what has been referred to above as the institution of international development.

## The Origins of International Development:

Like most innovations in the political organisation of societies throughout history, the institution of International Development arose following a period of destruction and violence. It is not until the end of WW2 that it is possible to attribute any real commitment or stability to the international pursuit of development. The aftermath of WW2 was a time in which the European colonial powers were beginning to withdraw from their various colonies throughout the world. The costs of maintaining the colonial relationship was an additional strain for the already struggling Western European powers and the growing anti-colonial movements within these countries necessitated a change in the structure of this relationship.

Problems arose however because the nationalist and anti-colonial sentiments that had been developing over the previous decades created an environment in which the economic and political aspirations of these new nations far exceeded the means available to achieve them. Poverty in many of these areas continued to be a significant problem and with the power vacuum left behind in the wake of the colonial administrations, corruption and conflict characterized the politics of many of these newly independent states (Cornwell, 1999; Englebert, 2000; Lee, 2000). In his assessment of this situation Kingsbury (2012) suggests that “the peoples and governments of most developed or industrialized countries acknowledged that they had and continue to have some responsibility to assist these poorer countries” (p. 1).

The colonial era had been such a part of the identity of both the developed and developing world that to withdraw from these countries and avoid taking any responsibility for the social ills that occurred afterward was both politically and morally unpalatable to the people and leaders of the former empires. The extent to which moral considerations played a role in this movement away from colonial rule is debateable however. Kingsbury (2012) extends his assessment of the situation suggesting that an underlying motivation must have included an element of economic pragmatism. Doing away with colonial rule and pursuing a relationship based on trade and development assistance instead would simultaneously release pressure on the colonial purse and open up new opportunities for trade and economic gains once the former colonies had been incorporated into the global economy (p. 1). The assumption being made was that these new nations being incorporated into the global economy was good for all involved. The new nations would develop by their inclusion in the global economy, leading to an improved living standard for their populations, the end result being greater political stability and peaceful relations in all parts of the world. This sounds like it could have been the perfect liberal vision, but, as Kingsbury (2012) notes, all this was going on in the context of an ideological battle being waged between the Western Capitalist and the Communist blocs. In a similar vein, McKay (2012) remarks that “Notions of power are central to development thought – some would even argue that power is the pivotal concept in the whole corpus” (p. 57). It is in this aspect of international development that its deep connection to international power politics can be gleaned. The promise of development and an escape from poverty could be used as a foreign policy tool to recruit the newly formed nations to one or other of the two ideological camps. Born in the context of Cold War ideological contestation,

a large part of the initial impetus for cooperation in pursuit of development was based on these promises made by rival ideological blocks, each with a different vision of what constitutes a developed society. The Western liberal-capitalist bloc championed the virtues of the free market and civil and political liberties, while the Soviet communist bloc championed, at least rhetorically, the causes of justice, equality and the common will of the people. Westad (2005) has suggested that this contestation was between the 'empire of liberty' and the empire of justice.' As will be made clear in subsequent sections of this thesis, the obvious and immediate political nature of this contestation appears to have subsided, but the philosophies and political prescriptions which characterize these opposing conceptions of development live on in the discourse of international development.

### **Ideology at Inception:**

As suggested above, the forces and motivations that seem to have provided the impetus for an institution of international development were born out of a very particular historical and political context. After having witnessed the evils and atrocities of a Second World War in less than half a decade, the connection between poverty, hopelessness and the types of political chaos which gave rise to some of the most radical and malevolent dictators of the modern era, was clear. Hitler and the National Socialist Nazi party being the foremost example of this. The ravages of war had left many areas of the world with a need to rebuild and revise the relationship between the population and the state, and between the state and the rest of the world. Although it suffered a significant number of human casualties during the war period, economically and militarily the United States (U.S) emerged post-war as the preeminent military and economic power in world politics. It was uncontestedly the owner of the most powerful military force, the strongest economy and the greatest wealth reserves (Wallerstein, 1993, p. 1). On paper it would have been hard to imagine why the U.S would have been overly concerned with a threat emanating from the Soviet Union. In order to understand the political context and events of the post-WW2 world, and indeed the patterns of discourse which would eventually stabilize and form an institution of international development, it is important to recognize the ideological contestation which underlay diplomacy during this period.

Upon the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 the issue of sovereignty became a central organizing principle in IR. Respect for state sovereignty would enshrine the preeminent position of the sovereign state "as the recognized authority over the space defined

by its national boundaries, as the legal body able to pass laws and initiate policy, and as the only legitimate user of armed force to ensure its stability and will” (Mckay, 2012, p. 56). Undoubtedly, the commitment to respect for state sovereignty institutionalised in the United Nations Charter had a moral component, broadly aiming at facilitating peaceful relations among states and the prevention of war as a protection for citizens against the ills of competitive power politics. But as previously mentioned, the extent to which this respect for sovereign and national autonomy was an act of moral principle can be contested. It obviously also had pragmatic value to the severely weakened colonial empires that were trying to recover after being depleted in the war. The situation of the U.S was different in that it found itself in a strong position to exert influence over the emerging new order of international relations. In international relations literature this has been described in terms of U.S hegemony (Nye, 1990; Wallerstein, 1993; Huntington, 1999). However, despite the clearly dominant military and economic position of the U.S, ideologically a war was still brewing. With colonial empires retreating from their overseas territories, and in many cases leaving behind a strong nationalistic fervour, the ideological direction which these emerging sovereign political entities would take was uncertain. Expectations for improvements in standards of living and the development of self-determination in political and economic affairs were high in these nascent states, and, at the time, it was far from decided that Western capitalism and free markets were the route to achieve them. Indeed, the flaws of capitalism and the market were seen by many as the cause of the pattern of boom and bust which lead to the eventual rise of fascist regimes like that of the National Socialists in Germany (Lukes, 1997, p.29; Hitchcock, 2003, p. 1-125). As militarily and economically powerful as the U.S was, this strength did not translate into the ideological power needed to convince the rest of the world to follow it into the future. The real concern for the U.S and its allies in Western Europe was that Stalinist Russia and its communist doctrine would be attractive to the fledgling nation states desperate to consolidate the political power bestowed upon them by their status as sovereign entities (Leffler, 1992, p. 1-141). Decolonization played a major role in the escalation of Cold War tensions as it provided avenues for communist influence. The nationalist movements within many of the newly sovereign states were eager to modernize and develop their countries. This, coupled with a distrust of the capitalist system, made the communist ideology at work in the Stalinist Command economy an attractive path forward (Westad, 2000; Engerman, Gilman, Latham, & Haefele, 2003). It is within this context that



we can begin to see the clearly political and ideological motivations that lay at the bottom of international development practice at its inception.

Knowing that the reputation of free-market capitalism was not in good stead, the American economists and politicians charged with promoting the Western vision for international development were careful not to be too brash with their economic prescriptions for developing nations. There was a recognition that newly developing states, and those states who had been ravaged by war time would not be able to recover if they did not have the capital available to invest in industry and raw materials. On the part of the U.S there was a real concern that if countries, particularly the formerly wealthy and industrious European countries, were left to their own devices they would, in the words of Assistant Secretary Dean G. Acheson become a “Europe turned in on itself attempting to organize itself on the basis of two enduring factors, land and labor” (Bretton Woods Agreement Act, 1945, p.21). In such a situation, these countries would “have to indulge in every kind of restrictive practice to force their exports on other people and to get such imports as they vitally needed (Bretton Woods Agreement Act, 1945, p. 22). This was unacceptable to the U.S as it was these types of restrictive practices which had been blamed for the Great Depression and the conditions which gave rise to the fascism and totalitarianism that led to War (See Lukes, 1997, p.29; Hitchcock, 2003, p. 1-125; Schild, 1995). From the U.S. perspective, if the world was going to avoid the pitfalls of an over-regulated and restrictive economic system, the U.S. would need to step up and provide the leadership and financial backing necessary to restore faith in the capacity of free-market capitalism to provide development and prosperity for all the world’s nations. Pursuing a programme of international development was to be an important part in this mission (See Gilman, 2003, ch. 3 for a more in-depth discussion of development in relation to U.S hegemony).

In order to conclude this section on the origins of international development it is worth considering some of the rhetoric and policy prescriptions that arose out of the U.S administration of the day. On March 12, 1947 Truman gave an address during a joint session of Congress. The substance of this address and the emerging position of the U.S I believe is encapsulated in these lines.

I believe it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.

I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way.

I believe that our help should be primarily through economic and financial aid which is essential to economic stability and orderly political processes.

Less than three months later the ideas put forward in this speech were then initiated into action with the announcement of the 'Marshall Plan' the purpose of which was to provide economic aid to the nations of Western Europe as they sought to rebuild after WW2. During his speech at Harvard on the 5th of June 1947, George Catlett Marshall, author and advocate of the Marshall plan, stated the following,

It is logical that the United States should do whatever it is able to do to assist in the return of normal economic health in the world, without which there can be no political stability and no assured peace. Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos. Its purpose should be the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist.

The response of the U.S to the context that had emerged following WW2 clearly had an ideological and political stance aimed at the containment of the other world superpower in the Soviet Union. The institutions, organizations and agreements that arose during this moment of U.S hegemony post WW2 should all be seen in this light. This includes the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Marshall Plan. Such a cynical and single-cause interpretation of the origins of international development should not be unduly endorsed however. As mentioned above, it is hard to deny that there was a moral component to the establishment of these institutions and plans for the development of post-colonial states. The world had seen a lot of darkness in the first half of the century and it would not be unreasonable to suggest that perhaps it was the intention of at least some people in the seats of power to positively affect the world in a way that went beyond power politics or rational calculations of self and national interest. It is certainly plausible that many of the diplomats, scholars and technical experts tasked with carrying out the plans for a programme of international development weren't just acting as vessels of the interests of the political elites. So too on the part of the Western economists, who so passionately championed the virtues of peaceful economic exchange in the free market, it is not unreasonable to assume that there was a belief that through free trade and exchange the world's conflict-ridden past

could be overcome. The temptation of single-cause and reductive explanations of complex events is something that should be avoided wherever possible. To attribute either the origins, or the historical trajectory of international development to any one cause whether power politics, moral principle, or calculations of self and national interests would result in a failure to explain anything. This problem becomes clearer as ideas about international development are adapted and changed to adhere to the new contexts which the unfolding of history provides. This passage written by McKay (2012) is pertinent in this regard.

Ideas in development theory and practice cannot be divorced from the broader assumptions, aspirations and beliefs of any age. These more general modes of thought set the scene for more specific discussions of what development is, or should be, and the most appropriate policies and methods that can be harnessed in the search for this elusive promised land of happiness and prosperity (p. 55).

#### **Morality, Rationality, and the Wider Debates:**

The modern study of development covers a great number of subject areas across a great number of disciplines. This is perhaps the reason that as a field of study, particularly in terms of its political prescriptions, it has been more evolutionary than revolutionary, operating in a pendulum-like manner (Currie-Alder; Kanbur; Malone; & Medhora, 2014, p. 19). McKay (2012) too notes the pendulum-like behaviour of development theory and practice, characterizing the history of ideas on development as “a series of revolutions and counter-revolutions” and that often the key ideas from periods past re-emerge under new guises, taking over the field once again (p. 53).

If the dominant ideas about development in the contemporary period are more about the result of an underlying debate characterized by a series of revolutions and counter-revolutions then the subject matter that it deals with cannot be seen to be amoral or non-normative. Efforts to theorize how development occurs rely on our assumptions about what constitutes the nature of a developed society. There is no recognized standard for legitimate knowledge about the process of development which can be used to uncover more and more development truths. Knowledge about the process of development does not accumulate linearly over time. A lot of the debates that we engage in are debates about what the underlying principles guiding development action should be and how they are best pursued. The issues that we

fight over are philosophical in nature and the conclusions that we come to about what development is, and why and how it should be pursued, are the result of our answers to a much more basic set of questions. To see how this plays out in the field of development studies an examination of the historical trajectory of international development thought and practice since WW2 is provided here.

### **The Study and Practice of Development since WW2: An Overview**

Because of the expansiveness of the field of development studies, the challenge of forming an overarching account or simple summary of the ideas, issues, and methods which constitute it is essentially insurmountable. Noting this difficulty Williams (2014) has suggested instead that there is utility in viewing the study of development from a higher level of abstraction, concentrating on the tensions which shape discourse on the subject. Williams (2014) identifies three tensions.

- 1) The tension between generating widely applicable knowledge and policy prescriptions and generating knowledge of particular development successes and failures.
- 2) The tension between generating knowledge of “development” as a process of structural transformation (that in some way replicates the transition to “modernity” with all that implies – industrialization, urbanization, and so on) and generating knowledge of the particular problems and issues associated with a lack of development (access to clean water, malnutrition, maternal mortality, and so on).
- 3) The tension between economics as the primary discipline within which development was studied, and the contribution of other academic disciplines (p. 23-24).

Devarajan and Kanbur (2014) too in their analysis of the evolution of development thought and practice have found it wise to approach the subject with reference to the central tension of balancing market and government failure. Brett (2009) provides additional support to the view that development ideas and policies can be usefully analysed as an interplay between “structuralist” or state-driven theories as against liberal and neo-liberal theories stressing the importance of market forces.

The utility in viewing the historical trajectory of the international development institution in terms of the tensions which characterize it is that it allows for the categorization of both theorists and political actors based on the positions they take on these key issues. It is then possible to track the continuity of old ideas with their updated formulation in a new historical context. It is by analysing how arguments on both sides have evolved and responded to each other over time that it becomes possible to direct enquiry towards their underlying philosophical and moral assumptions. In other words, if development thought and practice is a series of revolutions and counter-revolutions, what are they fighting over?

### The State and Growth:

The first category that is relevant in the period following WW2 are those theorists and practitioners who advocated the central role of state intervention in the pursuit of economic growth and of development more generally. As noted earlier, capitalism and free-markets had been heaped with much of the blame for the events of the first half of the 20th century and so continuation of this following WW2 was no longer philosophically or politically viable. The concern about market failures as a barrier to development and growth was perhaps most famously encapsulated by Rosenstein-Rodan (1944) and Lewis (1954). Rosenstein-Rodan (1944)'s identification of the coordination failures of free-market capitalism and the central role of the state in organizing society towards a "big push"; and Lewis (1954)'s insistence that the state would be vital in ensuring that the surplus labour of traditional subsistence-based economies would be put to productive use solidified the pre-eminence of state-interventionist theories in development thought and practice. As noted earlier, the Western powers, especially the U.S., were well aware of the less-than-favourable reputation of free-market capitalism and so the emphasis on the necessity of state-intervention for growth and development was reflected in the policies of the new Western-driven international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The status of the state was, of course, also bolstered by recognition of the international ordering principle of sovereignty which had gained status under the United Nations. It is generally recognized that from the end of WW2 well into the 1960's development thought and practice was dominated by ideas which saw the state as the main engine of development.

During this time the field of development studies itself was principally confined to the study of economics. Indeed, much of the early days of development thinking were spent trying to determine whether there was even a need for a separate branch of economic thinking that

dealt specifically with the unique circumstances of developing nations. This relates to the first of the three tensions identified above by Williams (2014). The argument was over whether there could be broad economic prescriptions and principles which, if applied, would put a society on a path towards meaningful and sustainable economic growth. The opposing side would argue that because of their unique economic circumstances, undeveloped countries would require different, more particular policies to achieve growth (Williams, 2014, p.23). In the 1950's and 1960's the perspective which guided development practice was that of the side who argued for the tailoring of economic policies to the undeveloped states unique economic starting position. Theorists such as Rosenstein-Rodan (1944) and Lewis (1954) were influential during this period not only for their emphasis on state-intervention but also because they argued that undeveloped countries could not usefully be analysed using classical economic theories. Another thing that these theorists all had in common was their emphasis on the centrality of capital in the process of development (Harriss, 2014, p.39). Capital accumulation would increase investment in nascent industries and this would lead to more and more economic growth and the gradual industrialization and development of the nation-state. There was, however, still disagreement over what this process would look like. Some, like Gerschenkron (1962, original essay written 1951) saw these stages as being dependant on the level of "backwardness" each nation had started at. While others, such as Rostow (1960) suggested that the path to development would be the same for all those who applied the correct policies. But there was at least some consensus in the means that would be required to achieve development. Capital was the key ingredient. It would be the state's job to intervene in the functioning of the domestic economy and ensure that labour was being used efficiently, freeing up capital to be used to build new industry. The international institutions too would have a role in providing the macro-economic policies by which states should organize their economies. Connected to this also would be the availability of foreign aid to provide an initial boost in capital.

In the 1950's and 1960's the accepted goal or content of development was defined in terms of economic growth (Leys, 1996, p. 7; Harriss, 2014, p. 39-40). Faith in the state and its policy-makers to produce conditions of rapid growth were high after the war, and regardless of the ideological stance taken by national elites in the geopolitical rivalry between the West and the Soviets, growth was the central metric by which development was to be measured (Yusuf, 2014, p. 50-54).

### Modernization and Historical Progress:

With the focus so tightly placed on growth, the direction that this growth would take a society once it was achieved was largely taken for granted. The political context of development here becomes relevant once again. The two ideological blocs, the Capitalist West and the Communist Soviets, presented two very different narratives about where growth would lead. While the political element of this contestation was played out in the rhetoric and policies coming out of the two blocs, the positions which they represented had a deep connection with underlying philosophical debates. McGillivray (2012), paying more attention to the theoretical and philosophical significance of these conceptions of development, identifies the contestation as being between a view of development as either modernization or historical progress.

McGillivray (2012) defines modernization as “a process whereby societies move through a fundamental, complete structural transition from one condition to another, from a starting point to an end point (p. 25).” The starting point being a traditional society, and the end point being a modern society very much like those of the modern West. In the traditional society there is a large reliance on the agricultural sector. Modernization entails that over time developing societies will come to rely more on their manufacturing activities brought about through the emergence of the industrial sector and the use of new technologies. This will then lead to a services sector which will further diversify economic output and lead to a modern society where material prosperity is high and the consumer is king (McGillivray, 2012, p. 25-27).

Perhaps the most well-known theorist associated with modernization theory as it is commonly understood is Walt Whitman Rostow. In his 1960 book “The Stages of Economic Growth: A non-communist manifesto”, Rostow essentially outlined the mainstream Western vision of the development process as a whole. Although the principal drivers of this process were economic, it was understood that there would be a number of necessary political, institutional, and cultural changes that would accompany it. Unsurprisingly, these political, institutional, and cultural changes mirrored the changes that had occurred in Western societies during their own path to modernity. States would inevitably be politically liberal and economically efficient because of the meritocratic economic system that liberal individualism demands. Another central tenet in Rostow’s conception of development was that meaningful development could be achieved without the need for revolution. And the best part about it

was that the theory assumed that every nation had the potential to pass through these stages and achieve modernity (Mckay, 2012, p. 59). If the title “a non-communist manifesto” did not make it clear enough, Rostow was arguing against the conception of development being championed by the West’s communist rivals in the Soviet Union. The Harrod-Domar growth model was also influential within the modernization paradigm and provided a more economic focussed and, perhaps, less ideological argument for the vision of development which modernization championed. The broad argument of this model suggested that growth could be self-sustaining and lead to a ‘virtuous cycle of growth’ (Mckay, 2012, p. 60). The trajectory that the society following the prescriptions of modernization theory would take was undeniably positive.

Historical progress as defined in McGillivray (2012) “refers to the unfolding of human history, over a long period of time, in a manner that is thought to be progressive (p. 25).” The central issue then is determining what is meant by progress. In European thought the concept of progress is commonly traced to the ideas of the philosophers of the Enlightenment period. Progress was defined as the result of right action. Right action being action in accordance with reason. It was in the idea of progress that the enlightenment philosophers were able to provide a rational basis for ethical judgement (Harriss, 2014, p.35). Human agency figures centrally in this idea of progress, and it is through the application of human abilities such as initiative and intelligence exercised in accordance with reason that progress is thought to be achieved. This view of progress provides the underlying philosophy that supports the case that modernisation theory makes. That is, individual agents using their initiative and intelligence in accordance with reason to produce economic growth would be classed as the necessary conditions to achieve progress. As the stages of modernization unfold, individuals would continue to use their powers of reasoning to determine how to act, and this would lead to the emergence of the institutional, political and cultural changes necessary to continue growing the economy. A liberal democratic capitalist state would be the end goal of this process because it supports the individualist ethic required for the free expression of individual rational action. The above view of historical progress informs the liberal view of development and modernization.

A different conception of what historical progress looks like comes from Karl Marx. Where Marx differs in his concept of progress is in his focus on material and economic inequalities in society and how this affects the freedom of certain groups of individuals. In Marx’s theory



of progress all societies begin in a primal stage where the only concern of individuals is their immediate survival. Beyond this stage is the feudal stage in which an elite class owns private property and oppresses and exploits the majority who live as a serf class. The Feudal stage gives way to the capitalist stage in which the ability to have private property is extended to all, allowing the productive capacity of society to grow rapidly. There are winners and losers in the game of capitalism however and over time a dominant capitalist class emerges, exploiting the labour of those individuals who do not have any control over the means of production. This leads to the alienation of the proletariat and an eventual overthrowing of the capitalist class. The means of production are seized by the proletariat and this leads to the final stage, communism. Central to this view is the concept of alienation which Marx suggests will be an inevitable side effect of capitalism. For Marx, to become alienated is the same as to have your freedom diminished. According to Marx, the proletariat often suffer as a result of their participation in wage labour. For Marx, work and labour are supposed to be fundamental expressions of individuality with a deep connection to the good of the community. It is an intimate social relation. Within a capitalist system the worker becomes a mere instrument, not an individual acting on his own behalf and with social purpose in mind. Work then is unable to provide the individual with an avenue for him to express and manifest his creative human essence within his historically conditioned context. This subordination of his creative human essence to the interests of a capitalist class intent on using his labour for their own narrow purposes is surely intolerable to the individual. It is no wonder then that Marx saw the inevitable result of this situation as being conflict and revolution. In order for individuals to be truly free in Marx's terms, the capitalist class who suppressed their essential nature would have to go.

It is in the tension between the above two theories of development and their treatment of the issue of freedom that we can begin to see the differences in the moral assumptions which give rise to them. Individuals and states who do not have equal abilities to succeed in a capitalist paradigm will inevitably become hierarchically organized according to their ability to accrue material wealth. The question that the Marxist theory of progress forces us to ask is whether there can be meaningful freedom for all if society is organized hierarchically on the basis of success within a capitalist economic system. The modernization theorists on the other hand place a much greater emphasis on the freedom of individuals to utilize their individual agency in the pursuit of wealth, and therefore growth. Although hierarchical organization may

emerge as a result, growth is good for all individuals in society in the long run. The central question the modernization theorists might ask then is, if the hierarchies are levelled, as they would be in a communist state, would we not lose much of the productive force that accumulates capital and creates growth in the process? As will become clear in subsequent sections of this thesis, the different conceptions of freedom implicit in the modernization and Marxist theories of development are a result of their very different philosophical starting points.

The next phase of development thinking centres around critiques of modernization theory. This branch of development thought has become known as the Dependency school.

### Dependency and the Transcendence of Development as 'Growth':

After the first decade or so of development orthodoxy, modernization theory came under sustained attack due to the failure of its prescriptions to deliver results. Many of these critiques came from outside of the modernization school, but even within the modernization school itself the gap between theory and reality did not go unnoticed. In the late 1950s, Gunnar Myrdal (1957) and Albert Hirschmann (1958) were significant figures whose ideas originated out of, or were roughly consistent with, the tradition of modernization theory. Both scholars however did not accept the overly positive and linear direction that development would follow based on modernization's prescriptions. A central tenet of their work was that the possibility of 'virtuous' cycles of growth were no more possible than potentially 'vicious' cycles, and that in many cases these cycles could operate side by side (Mckay, 2012, p.61). The faith in the modernization process to balance and stabilize the processes of development as they unfolded across all areas of social and economic life took a great hit during this period as scholars like Myrdal and Hirschman began to point out the growing inequalities within and between societies. These initial critiques foreshadowed the more radical critiques that would begin to appear from the late 1960s onwards.

In the late 1960s it was clear to many people involved in the international development field that the course that modernization had charted was not being followed by developing nations. It was not necessarily the case that national economies were not growing. McGillivray (2012) makes this point when he notes that "between 1961 and 1970 the per capita national incomes in the high-income countries grew at an annual average rate of more than 4 per cent while over the same period the middle- and low-income countries grew at annual average rates of

just over 2 and just under 1 per cent respectively” (p. 29). The issue that was of foremost concern to scholars and policy-makers during this period was the inequality that was growing between people within societies, and between nations themselves. The consensus that emerged was that whatever gains were made by the growth evident in the increase in measures of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Gross National Product (GNP) or Gross National Income (GNI), these gains did not reach the poor. It is in the ideas of this period that we can see the second and third tensions identified by Williams (2014) starting to manifest. Up until this point, development had been identified with economic growth and it was assumed that as long as there was growth there would be large-scale structural change over time. These changes were assumed to lead to the modernization of a society and of ills associated with the less developed stages. In finding out that this was not the case, development as growth was shown to be an inadequate definition if it is to be insisted that development include some level of equitable distribution of its fruits.

Most famously articulated by Argentine economist Raul Prebisch, this new branch of thought saw the poorer developing nations being locked into a process of underdevelopment with richer nations who use their superior economic and political power to structure trade relations to their benefit (Dimarco, 2014). While Raul Prebisch saw this situation as a somewhat inevitable result of market forces at the international level, another well-known theorist from this period Andre Gunder Frank had a more pessimistic view arguing that this process of underdevelopment was in fact systematically pursued by the richer nations and was an outgrowth of their capitalist ethic: “Development and underdevelopment are the opposite sides of the same coin” (Frank, 1975). In Frank’s view, the external forces that constitute the international system were the determining factors. Particularly Frank’s work in this area is often seen as having a strong basis in Marxist thought (see Stephens, 2014 for a good discussion of Frank’s work in relation to Marxism). While Frank was quite pessimistic about the ability of what were considered periphery nations to break out of this relationship of underdevelopment, others such as Cardoso & Faletto (1979) had a more optimistic interpretation of the economic situation described initially by Prebisch. They saw alternatives to the current situation of underdeveloped nations and asserted that there was nothing inevitable about their economic situation. Central to their thinking was the idea that these underdeveloped peripheral nations have agency, and that they are not beholden entirely to the influence of external forces. In other words, through the exercising of their agency they could

find a way of integrating into the world economy that would allow them to develop. This debate is another manifestation of the first tension identified by Williams (2014). In this instance the debate leans away from the idea that there can be some general prescription to suit all developing countries. Nations then must look out for themselves, devise their own plans, and pave their own way forward in the international political economy.

### Changes in the Academy:

Before moving on to the next clear phase in development thought and practice it is worth mentioning some significant changes which were occurring in the academy during this period. In the field of growth economics which had been so dominant in the initial phase of development thought and practice, the faith in the combination of capital and labour producing growth had taken a great hit. In the late 1950s an economist by the name of Robert Solow revolutionized the field by showing that as much as 70 percent of the growth in the U.S was not tied to the commonly heralded input factors of capital and labour. He suggested instead that most of the growth produced in an economy like that of the U.S was due to residual factors, technology being the most obvious (See Solow 1956, 1957). Whatever proportion of growth could be traced to the input factors of capital and labour, it also faced the added criticism that this proportion did basically nothing to affect a more equal distribution of that growth. This was evidenced by the fact that many countries, as mentioned earlier, had actually achieved growth as a result of modernization based economic policies. The problem was that this growth had also coincided with the rise of inequality within and between societies. In countries such as the U.S where, although far from equally, the fruits of economic growth were dispersed among a larger proportion of the population, this had occurred as a result of intangible factors involving technology and education (see Yusuf, 2014, p. 54). This discovery of these intangible factors led to a renewed focus on the negative economic effects of high poverty levels. As mentioned earlier, poverty was seen as undesirable because of its connection with political instability and conflict, and perhaps also because it would be immoral to allow people to suffer in poverty if something could actually be done about it. What was added to this equation as a result of Solow's breakthrough in economic theory was that poverty was also a hindrance to economic growth. An impoverished population meant that many of the intangible factors which drive more inclusive and meaningful forms of growth lay dormant in the unexploited potential of those

impoverished sectors of society. This more extensive conception of development input factors became known as ‘total factor productivity’ (TFP). The result of this breakthrough in economics was that the field of development studies itself became more open to the insights of other academic disciplines in an attempt to theorize and explain the intangible factors which classical economics struggled with. As will be suggested in the following section, this broadening of the field of development studies led to greater complexity at the level of practical application. This is part of the reason for the dramatic shift which began in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s.

#### **Human Potential, the Tigers, and The Neo-Liberal Revolution:**

During the 1970s and 1980s, development thought was flourishing. Breaking free of the field of growth economics and armed with a new focus on equality in all its manifestations a number of theorists began to break new ground in the understanding of what constituted development. In the early 1970s, Dudley Seers famously rejected the notion that development was an objective or positive concept. McGillivray (2012) eloquently summarises Seers’ description of development as “a concept that requires us to identify the normative conditions for a universally acceptable aim” (p. 32). Countering rising levels of poverty and inequality was central to Seers vision for development. He also considered a number of other factors such as the necessity of having a job for individual self-respect and the enhancement of individual personality, as well as public goods including education, freedom of speech and political and economic sovereignty (McGillivray, 2012, p. 32-33). For Seers, development was no longer about objective facts or positive statements about what has or is going to happen. Development was about what ought to happen. Seers and those scholars who follow a similar line of thought assumed that in principle, it is possible to identify a universally acceptable aim in the “realization of the potential of human personality” (Seers, 1972, p.21). Once this aim is identified, it is possible to start the process of agreeing to a set of basic conditions that must be met for this realization to take place. Development outcomes then could be measured based on the extent to which these conditions are seen to be met within societies. This strand of development thought gave rise to what has become known as the ‘basic needs’ approach. Debates about what constituted basic needs focussed on the issue of alleviating poverty and inequality and rejected the idea of development as something that could be objectively or positively defined and reduced to standards such as an increase in economic growth (McGillivray, 2012, p. 33-35).

In the 'basic needs' approach there is evidence of Williams' (2011) second and third tensions. In the work of these new, more normatively inclined theorists, large-scale structural change was to take a back seat to a much more concentrated focus on the concrete problems faced by those people still living in conditions of poverty and oppression. If the goal was to create conditions for the realization of human potential, it was easy to agree that this could not be done if people did not have adequate water and food access, shelter, education, healthcare. The list goes on depending on the theorist. Freed of the constraints of classical economic theory, these theorists sought the source of development outside of growth economics. The assumption that guided them was that growth by itself could not produce meaningful development for a vast majority of the world's poorest people. In fact, growth itself may not be able to be realized unless it was supplemented by other component parts of development. These would ensure that the benefits of growth were distributed evenly, ecologically sustainable and conducted in a political context which was inclusive and governed by the rule of law. Real development focussed on unlocking human potential in all parts of society. Only then would it be possible to say that the development achieved is good -- in a normative and ethical sense.

Another important contribution made by Seers (1971) was his assessment of the required social changes that would have to occur in more traditional societies if they were to participate successfully in the modern economy:

If the people who subsisted on this land are now to exploit it more intensively for national and international markets, they will have to master a far more complex social organization, extending to include more different kinds of people towards whom a person must behave with competence. They begin to form part of different systems of relationship which may have little in common, and may even be based on incompatible principles. In different situations, they may need to act from quite different conceptions of the nature of social organization (p. 88-89).

In the work of Seers there is a recognition that in the pursuit of development, societies would have to undergo dramatic cultural and political changes in order to accommodate the new social relationships required for the development of their societies. This idea was not overly new. The recognition of a changing nature of social organization was always built into modernization and historical progress theories. The difference in Seers' conception of this process was that it would not be a necessary and logical consequence of increasing economic

growth and wealth. For Seers, these changes would be met with conflict at every step by a countervailing force intent on rejecting the demands of these new and complex relationships: “Tribalism, linguistic nationalism, nepotism, racialism all seek to limit involvement, to reduce the scale of life once more to manageable proportions, however crippling the economic cost “(Seers, 1971, p. 87).

Seers’ perspective on the tension between the need to expand and diversify the range of social relationships and the countervailing force which seeks to protect the existing social order is an important update to the account of these changes by the modernization and historical progress theories. He does not position these profound social changes as inevitable or natural consequences of a historically determined process. Instead, they are what they are, profound changes that destroy, or slightly less dramatically, irrevocably alter the political and cultural structures of traditional societies. These changes can, and probably should be, negotiated, and if this is the case, there is no reason to suspect that the process by which these changes occur, or are implemented, should be the same for any developing nation. All societies are not alike both in terms of their material make-up, and their political and cultural characteristics. Basic needs therefore may be universal, but the way in which these needs would be able to be met would almost certainly necessitate consideration of the particular material, political and cultural characteristics of developing nations. Unsurprisingly, a lot of the debates that characterized scholarship in this area were about the extent to which needs could be said to be universal and what this meant for action at the practical level.

While this more subjective and normative conception of development was being theorized outside the confines of classical economics, within the economic field the parameters of the debate had not changed significantly. New areas started with the introduction of the idea of Total Factor Production (TFP), but it is arguable whether the innovations associated with TFP have had any significant effects on the success of economic planning for growth. The recognition of human capital as an important component of TFP, for example, has been a mainstay of economic theory and development thought for a while now but as Yusuf (2014) notes, despite the clear importance of human capital in increasing and stabilizing growth rates “many of the answers countries are seeking must be found in the swampland of education ‘science’, itself full of interesting papers and dead ends” (Glewwe et al., 2011 as cited in Yusuf, 2014, p.59). The focus on poverty provided economists with a direction for their work, but all of the innovation in economic theory was still centred around getting the

balance of state and market forces right. In the 1970s, the role of the state in development processes was still seen as preeminent particularly because state support of rural development was seen as crucial in the attempt to reduce inequality and lift people out of poverty. This increased focus on rural development particularly in regard to agricultural production seemed to show some positive signs. The introduction of modern, high-yielding major cereals such as wheat, rice and maize proved to have a positive effect on the productivity of agriculture. It even received the title of the “green revolution” as it was hoped that the increased productivity would decrease the attractiveness of a “red revolution”, that is, a turn towards communism. This direction in development thought and practice was disrupted however when a number of international political and economic events in the early 1980s conspired to send development practice sharply in the direction of market-driven liberal policies.

The early 1980s was a period in which the global economy, and particularly the economies of the developing world were severely strained. As McGillivray (2012) notes, this was largely due to significant declines in oil prices. Many countries experienced high inflation, significant debt (both public and private), and low levels of investment (p. 35). Because of the dominance of the state-led development model from the 1950s onwards, inappropriate state interference in economic matters shouldered much of the blame for the economic downturn. Policy-makers, and in particular the policy-makers working for the international financial institutions, saw the solution to the world’s economic problems in neo-liberal thought (McGillivray, 2012, p.35; Williams, 2014, p. 24; Harriss, 2014, p. 43; and for more detail see Toye, 1987 and Williams, 2012).

In contrast to much of the scholarship suggesting the need to look at the particular economic, political and cultural contexts of individual developing nations, this neo-liberal turn in development practice was enacted under the assumption that neoclassical economic theory is universally applicable. Deepak Lal was an influential theorist at this time. In his view, the fundamental units used in economic analysis are always relevant, and so it was not necessary to alter classical economic theory and policies to accommodate developing nations. Indeed, he asserts that “there is by now a vast body of empirical evidence from different cultures and climates which shows that uneducated peasants act economically as producers and consumers” (Lal, 1983, p. 105). The confidence in this view during this period can be seen as partly the result of a particular reading of the causes of the rapid growth rates in east Asia from the early 1960s. Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan went through a



process of rapid industrialization and growth beginning in the early 1960s, while China too started to make dramatic gains in economic growth after Deng Xiaoping began liberalizing the Chinese economy following the disastrous Maoist era. Although the claim that this rapid economic growth in Asia can be attributed directly to free-market principles has been contested deeply by a number of scholars and political actors (see for example Johnson, 1982; White, 1988; Amsden, 1992; and Wade, 1990) this does not change the fact that in the early 1980's neoliberal thinking was dominant in the policies of the Western powers and the international institutions which managed the relationship between the West and the developing nations within its sphere of influence. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 too saw those on the side of state-driven centrally planned economies take another blow which only served to strengthen the case for neo-liberal reform.

Another factor in the neo-liberal ascendance in the 1980's which should be mentioned is its treatment of the concept of freedom. Harvey (2005) notes that

for any way of thought to become dominant, a conceptual apparatus has to be advanced that appeals to our intuitions and instincts, to our values and our desires, as well as to the possibilities inherent in the social world we inhabit. If successful, this conceptual apparatus becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to question (p. 5).

The concept of 'individual freedom' that was championed by the founding figures of neo-liberal thought, most famously perhaps by Friedrich Hayek, is another valuable addition to the discussion. It must be remembered that at this point in history the ideological contestation between the Liberal and Communist blocs was still raging. And the issue of individual freedom struck a much deeper chord with both the public and political actors than it would have if neo-liberalism was judged solely based on its merits as an economic philosophy.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the West became more self-confident in its identity as a champion of individual freedom, liberal democracy and the market economy. In this context, neo-liberal prescriptions can be seen as a drift back towards modernization-style development (Colcough & Manor, 1993). That is, that there is a common path that all nations can take to development in the form of market-driven economic growth. Moreover, the goals of development can also be said to be common in that modernity and the political and cultural changes which it

necessitates are the natural consequence of sustained economic growth and development. To develop, in this sense, is to become more like the liberal capitalist West. Fukuyama (1992) is often mentioned, although sometimes clumsily, in this vein as suggesting that following the defeat of communism the true path to development (liberal democracy and market capitalism) could no longer be denied. Rational action was once again an important component in this process. Individual freedom is held to be of vital importance because the individual is the source of rational judgement and action. It is the process by which individuals interact and cooperate with one another within the bounds of a state sanctioned institutional framework which supports strong private property rights and free trade that allows modernity to unfold. The belief was that the coordination of the interests of all individuals through a centrally planned economy could never match the efficiency and efficacy of the market-driven economy described above. This view was perhaps most influentially articulated by Friedrich Hayek in his book *The Road to Serfdom*.

The shift towards neo-liberal practice and the idea of a globalizing world was represented succinctly in what became known as the Washington Consensus (Williamson, 1990). This 'consensus' however proved to be based more on ideological fervour than on the merits of its effects in the world. Mounting scholarship explicating the significant role of the state in the development success of the East Asian countries was making a convincing case against the neo-liberal market orthodoxy promoted in the international financial institutions. Writers such as Amsden (1989) and Wade (1990) showed that the governments of the East-Asian success stories had played a major role in shaping and guiding their respective economies. Scholars such as Evans (1995) and Kohli (2004) were also providing a deeper theoretical understanding of why the role of the state in managing developing economies was absolutely necessary if development was to be sustained over a longer period, and if a wider section of the population was to share in the fruits of this development. Also, the structural adjustment programmes which had defined the relationship between the Western Powers and developing nations after the neo-liberal revolution were, by the admission of the international financial institutions themselves, doing more harm than good in many cases. Whatever hope resided in the concept of globalization, it was most certainly not shared by all, and much of the debate about development since the emergence of the so-called Washington Consensus has been centred on the claim to universality by the neo-liberal pro-globalization movement.

## Good Governance, Post-Development and Civil Society

By the 1990s development theory was in a state of disarray. The initial faith in the state-led structuralist models of the post-war period had been lost and no solution was then found in the dramatic neo-liberal shift that followed it (see Brett, 2009 for further detail). In many parts of the world, particularly in Africa, violence and civil wars were raging (see Bates, 2010, 2015). For them, a developed world of free-market economies engaging in peaceful and mutually beneficial trade seemed to be far away.

In the 1990s, another significant stage in development thought and practice emerges. The role of the state once again became central in theorizing development. This time though, it would need to avoid the inappropriate interventions which characterized the post-war period, allowing the creative potential of its populace to be channelled towards economic growth and development, while also providing the necessary structure and guidance to guard against the excesses of market competition. The focus now would be on good governance and strong and practical institutions. Evidence of this position can be seen in the World Bank report 'The State in a Changing World' published by in 1997: "Development without an effective state is impossible" (p. 18).

The idea that a balance must be found between the excesses of both state intervention and market forces, and that civil society would play an important role in achieving this, became known as the 'post-washington consensus' (Harriss, 2014, p. 45). This view largely assumed that liberal capitalism was an indispensable factor in development (see Fine et al., 2003). In the beginning, this line of thought took on quite a mechanistic character in that there was an assumption that the 'good state' in any particular context could be drawn from the same recipe. Economic rational action still dominated, and the focus was on how state-intervention and institution building might be able to impact the decisions of rational actors and thus facilitate and shape the path to development (Hall & Taylor, 1996; North, 1990). The idea was that in the modern context of globalized markets, theory and policy was to theorize and design new ways of linking the market, the state and also civil organizations. If markets were going to be successful, they would need to be embedded in the particular social contexts of each nation, taking advantage of existing social capital<sup>1</sup> as well as providing opportunities to expand and deepen it further. Central to the task of making markets more responsive to the

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<sup>1</sup> The term Social Capital is understood in this study with reference to Fukuyama's (2001) definition "an instantiated informal norm that promotes co-operation between individuals" (p. 7).

needs of people in developing nations was the opening of a larger role in governance for civil society. This attitude began to appear in the form of the championing of ‘ordinary people’ as crucial drivers of strong and healthy political institutions as well as a prosperous economy. In a 1989 report by the World Bank on the long-term plan for economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa, there is clear evidence of this shift in thinking towards the importance of social capital and civil society involvement in the development process.

The postindependence development efforts failed because the strategy was misconceived. Governments made a dash for “modernization,” copying, but not adapting, Western models. The result was poorly designed public investments in industry; too little attention to peasant agriculture; too much intervention in areas in which the state lacked managerial, technical, and entrepreneurial skills; and too little effort to foster grass-roots development. The top-down approach demotivated ordinary people, whose energies most needed to be mobilized in the development effort. (World Bank, 1989, p. 3)

This recognition of the importance of the energies of ordinary people was expressed perhaps most famously in the work of Putnam (1994). Putnam argues that civil society is an integral part of wealth creation and stable democracy.

Civil society can be defined as the “dense network of groups, communities, networks, and ties that stand between the individual and the modern state” (Kenny, 2016). In the context of the Western vision of development, civil society is an important component of a functioning liberal democracy (Putnam, 1994; Gellner, 1994). If minimal government and free-markets are to be effective, society must be capable of cooperating and organizing itself in most situations without the need for government intervention. A society without civil associations becomes susceptible to tyrannical government and other types of political malaises (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 11). In his renowned work ‘Democracy in America’, Alexis de Tocqueville described the importance of the ability to form associations through which the collective interests of free individuals could be represented politically, as well as embodied in organized practices which contain and model valued habits of co-operation. Well aware now of the failures of both the structuralist models of the immediate post-war period as well as their neo-liberal antidote, scholars attempting to provide a new way forward for development began to see the role of civil society, the “third sector” of society, as a possible answer (Harriss, 2014, p. 45).

As Fukuyama (2001) notes however, the character of a nation's civil society is formed out of its social capital (p.7). The interests and values that individuals organize around to form associations arise out of "iterated Prisoner's Dilemma games" as well as being a "by-product of religion, tradition, shared historical experience and other types of cultural norms" (p.7). Since social capital inheres in social relationships (Harriss, 2002, p. 27), the political interests and valued habits of co-operation expressed and acted out by civil society will depend to a great extent on cultural context. This issue of the role and potential of civil society in contributing to development represents a deep chasm between the ideas of those scholars who can be crudely placed in the modern and post-modern schools.<sup>2</sup>

Those writing from within a broadly modernist view still regarded liberal democracy and market capitalism as prerequisites of a developed state. As mentioned above, this would however come in a new form, with a much greater focus on the state's facilitative role and institution building. What these theorists had in common was that they had faith in the idea that the right institutional structures could lead to successful economic growth (c.f. North, 1990; Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2005), and to solutions for social problems more generally (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Williamson, 2000; Harriss, Hunter, & Lewis, 2003; Chang, 2002). Liberals in IR scholarship have also espoused the benefits of thinking about solutions to social problems in terms of institution building: "in a world politics constrained by state power and divergent interests, and unlikely to experience effective hierarchical governance, international institutions operating on the basis of reciprocity will be components of any lasting peace" (Keohane and Martin, 1995). Scholarship in this field attempts to understand the "rules, norms, and conventions that must exist for social life to be possible, and which both constrain and provide incentives for human action" (Harriss, 2014, p. 45). It is hoped that by getting the incentive structure right, human behaviour will be able to be coordinated in such a way as to produce desired results e.g. economic growth and poverty reduction.

Some scholars however, argue that this style of thinking has the effect of "depoliticizing development", promoting the illusion that social problems are amenable to technocratic solutions (Harriss, 2002). The idea that human energies can be productively channelled

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<sup>2</sup> This thesis uses the labels 'Modern' and 'Post-Modern' here to distinguish between two very different sets of epistemological assumptions. 'Modern' thinking has its origins in the 'enlightenment period' idea that human reason was a fundamentally competent mechanism by which knowledge of the world (including its normative dimension) could be known. 'Post-modern' thinking formed as a critique of this position. (For a detailed discussion see the sections on 'The Liberal Worldview' and 'The Post-Modern Worldview' in Section 2 of this thesis.

through an institutional structure built out of the right rules, norms, and conventions implies that it is possible to agree on or determine what those rules, norms, and conventions would be. Harriss (2002) argues that this very technical focus on social capital, civil society and institutional structure obscures the role of power and class relations which mediate social interaction. These technocratic understandings of the role of social capital and civil society, explains Harriss, serve to dismiss ideas emanating from the political left which identify the “roots of poverty” as emanating from class differences and power imbalances, as opposed to incorrect or sub-optimal institutional practices (Harriss, 2002, p.2). This concern for how power relations affect development has been a central focus of those scholars operating from within a ‘post-modern’ framework.

Scholars writing from within a post-modern framework put a far greater emphasis on the power relations between the developed nations of the West and those young nations who were the object of development initiatives. For them there is no reason to assume the superiority of supposedly universal liberal principles and norms of association. Indeed, it would be, and is, the opinion of many in the post-modern school of development that the political interests and valued habits of co-operation associated with liberal capitalist social organisation are outright destructive, unsustainable and inimical to the development of non-Western developing nations. For these scholars, traditional development theory must be left behind, and the concept of development itself must be redefined and reclaimed by those parts of the world who have been historically mistreated by the oppressive West.

### Post-Development Theory

The impetus for pursuing a “post-development” research program comes from the recognition in the early 1990s that development had reached an impasse (see Schuurman, 1993). What was needed were new visions for the future that broke through the narrow and West-centric modernization theory of development. Development must be ‘post-modern’ and be re-built from the ground up. Important in this project would be the consideration of how development is constructed through the production of knowledge, meaning, and identity (see Parfitt, 2002, 2011; and Ziai, 2007 for detailed discussions).

In his (1995) work *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* Arturo Escobar begins by describing the ‘dream’ of development which took hold of the minds of the powerful after the end of WW2. He then asserts that the goal of his work is to tell the story of this dream and “how it progressively turned into a nightmare (Escobar, 1995, p. 5). This dream which was born at a particular juncture in world history, through its “discourse and strategy” produced “massive underdevelopment and impoverishment” and “untold exploitation and oppression” (p. 5). This concept of development as a corrupt discursive construction which needs to be overcome and abandoned has become a significant theme in much work on development that has emerged from the late 1980s onwards. In the introduction to his important edited volume ‘*The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*’ Wolfgang Sachs provides a useful overview of the reasons necessitating a rejection and reimagining of international development. First, there was a growing recognition that the practices of large industrial societies were having dire ecological consequences provided the basis for critiques of development strategies emphasizing growth via industrialization and the free market (p. xvi). Second, the dying-off of the strategic concerns which characterized the post-war period would cause the project of international development to lose ideological steam (p. xvii). Third, growing inequalities within and between nations was evidence of the failure of the existing practices emanating from the West (p. xvii-xviii). And fourth, development was a “misconceived enterprise” right from its origins. Implicit in the idea of development is the idea that the human race is jointly moving in the same direction towards a state of maturity which is modelled by those nations “running in front” (p. xviii)

The way that scholars pursuing this line of enquiry conduct their research is by looking at the relationship between how development is constructed discursively and the form it takes in practice. These theorists note that “The primary purpose of the development text (like most others) is to convince, to persuade, that this (and not that) is the way the world actually is and ought to be amended (Crush, 1995, p. 5). By focussing on the texts of development then, scholars can consider how those texts represent and contain the interests and strategies of their authors. As Crush (1995) notes “ideas about development do not arise in a social, institutional or literary vacuum” (p. 5). Knowledge about development is indissolubly implicated in networks of power and domination and cannot help but carry the interests of its

author(s). As Claude Alvares describes it “Knowledge is power, but power is also knowledge. Power decides what is knowledge and what is not knowledge” (Alvares, 1992, p. 256). Much of the inspiration behind these works stems from the discourse theory of knowledge championed by Michel Foucault. On Foucault’s account, the formulation of knowledge is never free from the influence of power relations.<sup>3</sup> Development viewed in this way is not a neutral set of goals and knowledge which can be gradually uncovered and manifested in the world, it is instead a set of constructs and values which powerful actors seek to impose on weaker ones. Knowledge about what constitutes development is always relative because development is, as Crush (1995) notes:

fundamentally about mapping and making, about the spatial reach of power and the control and management of other peoples, territories, environments, and places (p. 6-7).

The post-development vision arises out of this recognition of the reality of power in the construction of development. For these scholars, in order to break out of the impasse in development thought and practice, individuals and cultures who have been historically mistreated and dispossessed by the Western development project will need to be liberated from the paternalism which characterized the earlier modes of development thinking. It is only through this liberation that the real needs of people will be reflected in development processes.

With their project set, the ideas of many of these post-modern theorists converge on the role for civil society (Crush, 1995, p. 56). For the post-development theorists however, the role civil society would play in the next phase of the development story would extend well beyond a technical focus on social capital and institution building. For them, civil society represents the source of alternative modes of development which will need to replace the obsolete and West-centric modernist model.

## Populism and Civil Society

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<sup>3</sup> See the section ‘From the Harmony of Interests to the Primacy of Power’ for a more detailed account of the philosophical bases of Foucault’s work and the relationship between Power and Knowledge.



While theorists operating out of the modernist tradition were attempting to develop ideas about how social capital and civil society could contribute to the creation of economically productive and politically stable democratic states, the post-development theorists saw in civil society the means by which this West-centric modernist tradition could be transcended altogether. Popular in the writings of many of these scholars was the idea of ‘new social movements’ (NSM) (See for example: Hettne, 1995; Lehmann, 1990; Corbridge, 1991; Escobar, 1995; Esteva, Prakash, & Shiva, 2014). Development thinking during this period began to reject the traditional binary of socialism vs capitalism which had been so dominant in the immediate post-war period. The new social movements were seen to be representative of the needs of ‘the people’, and the beginning of a new phase in development thinking. The fact that these movements are represented in development literature under one concept (NSM) betrays an undeserved generality and concreteness however. Scholars such as Parfitt (2011) have taken issue with the ability of post-development scholars to determine or even provide a standard by which legitimate representatives of emancipation can be distinguished from illegitimate (Parfitt, 2011, p. 447). Escobar (1995) suggests that the main goal of these NSMs is not to participate in traditional state politics, but rather to build common interests and ways of relating to the social and political environment which create ‘autonomous spheres’ and the possibility of ‘counter-hegemonic formations’ (p. 221). Through this process economic concerns will be able to be expressed from the perspective of alternative (non-Western) knowledge bases, and economic policy will become embedded in the social and cultural contexts of the people that they affect (See Wamba, 1991; Crush, 1995 p. 57). In the writing of these scholars, the idea that there is a universal core or essence of modernity and development is discarded and replaced by the idea that whatever ‘modernity’ or ‘development’ is, can only be legitimately defined and embodied in local or “rooted” terms (Esteva & Prakash, 2014, p. 193).

The focus on an emancipation of ‘the people’ in these works, the rejection of traditional nexuses of political power, and the promotion of relativist epistemologies naturally leads to considerations of populist politics (see Crush, 1995, p. 58; Nanda, 2001; Brass. 2015). Consequently, the ability to differentiate between populist movements that represent the real needs and desires of autonomous peoples, and movements which attempt to attain and exercise power in support of particular vested interests becomes a crucial issue. As we shall

see, this is not an easy task for post-development scholars operating on the basis of a relativist epistemology.

The general themes and arguments made by the post-development theorists have been subjected to a sustained critique by scholars who are much more sceptical about the possibilities of a new form of development emerging out of populist movements. Much of the criticism levelled against the post-development theorists is inherited from their connection with post-modern philosophy, in particular the discourse theory of power associated with Michel Foucault. Parfitt (2011) suggests that many post-development theorists, and Foucault himself, ignore the problem of 'performative contradiction'. This argument draws attention to the way that the work of the post-development theorists leaves no normative basis for the resistance to power. If knowledge is inextricably linked with power relations then there can be no standard of truth by which the validity of any given theory, including those of the post-development theorists, can be determined. Truth, for the post-development theorists seems to be merely a determination of the power of a given regime (Parfitt, 2011, p. 447). This critique stems from the implications of the relativist epistemology implicitly, and often explicitly endorsed by the post-development theorists. Even if it were to be agreed in principle that some social movement represents the 'real needs' of a particular group, this agreement would beg the question of what standard is being used to make that determination. In other words, if there is no objective knowledge as such, discourse and communication only serve as a battleground upon which competing groups attempt to establish their interests and interpretations as dominant. Indeed, this is exactly what the post-development theorists wish to critique. Their argument is that the West has imposed its own interpretation and interests on the rest of the world under the guise of 'international development' discourse. This interpretation may well be valid, but in order to then argue that this state of affairs is illegitimate and *should* give way to a new state of affairs in which the interpretations and interests of the historically oppressed are given precedence, this would need to be backed by some moral principle which provides content to the claim of illegitimacy. A performative contradiction lies in the fact that these theorists often do make these discursive moral claims of illegitimacy, while at the same time asserting that discursive moral claims (e.g. those emanating from Western development organisations) are only veils covering expressions of power. By extension, this would mean that any development policy, both extant and proposed, cannot be evaluated based on its merits for achieving a valued outcome, because to

achieve a valued outcome only means that a particular interpretation and set of values was privileged over others in the first place. The validity of the critiques of the post-development theorists seem to rest on an implicit acceptance that the power exercised by the West in development discourse is negative because it has repressive effects, but the power exercised by the non-Western social movements is legitimate because they have been historically oppressed. Again, this argument may well be valid, but it is important to be aware of its full implications.

The identification of knowledge construction with the exercise of power means that you cannot have one without the other. It is a point of confusion or inconsistency then that the post-development theorists assume that the 'new social movements' are exempt from the critique which derails the Western development project. The reason that post-development theorists do not seem to worry about this potential contradiction or inconsistency is that the respective knowledge bases and forms of social organization of these non-Western groups and social movements are natural, self-contained, or eternal. Brass (2015) has suggested that it is this way of thinking that has led to the re-emergence in academic debates of discussions concerning the immutability of 'natural' village-level social orders based around agriculture and family farming (Brass, 2015, p. 188). What Brass describes as 'agrarian populism' was particularly prominent amongst conservative and right-wing political groups in newly-industrializing nations in Europe in the pre-war period. It was argued by these groups that smallholding agriculture, or 'the peasant economy', should be protected by the state because it constituted the economic and cultural backbone of the nation (Brass, 2015, p. 188).

Commercial society, and modernity more broadly, were seen as a threat to the traditional cultural hierarchies of the nation. Brass makes the case that in the 'new' social movements prominent in the ideas of post-development theorists, the populist resistance to West-centric economic and political organisation has once again taken the form of the 'agrarian myth' of an eternal and natural peasant economy and identity (2015, p. 198). That the peasant economy and identity is seen as natural and eternal means that it has a special claim to authenticity unavailable to the modernist school. This strand of resistance to Western modernity makes use of a very distinct form of agency. Contrary to traditional Marxist or Socialist resistances to liberal capitalism, the focus is no longer on the capture and control of the state, coincident with a transition to socialism, but rather on a wholesale rejection of the state and its 'alien projects' (Brass, 2015, p. 192). Akhil Gupta's (1998) work *Postcolonial*

*Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* is a good representation of this type of thinking. In this work he describes how the teleologies of West-centric development can be defied by behaving as “hybridized, syncretic, inappropriate, postcolonial subjects” (Gupta, 1998, p. 232). Resistance to, and emancipation from Western modernity then stems not from the revolutionary activities of class agency, but instead occurs through the agency of authentic groups who hybridize the teleologies of the Western project with the “incommensurable and contradictory conceptions and ways of life” of their own cultures (Nanda, 2001, p. 164). The vital source of emancipatory energies then is the liberating nature of the victim’s<sup>4</sup> discourse (Prakash, 1990, p. 405). Formulated in this way, the victims of the Western development project do not necessarily have to be conceptualized as specific geographic spaces, nations or cultures. These victims, or as they have been often conceptualized in the literature ‘subalterns’, represent all those “persons and groups cut off from upward – and, in a sense, ‘outward’ – social mobility (Spivak, 2000, p. 325). These subaltern discourses are vital for the construction of modern subjects which transcend the oppressive and neo-colonial constraints imposed on them by the West. Viewing the situation in this way means that the subject positions constitutive of these subaltern discourses will be extremely diverse. What they have in common however is that they are all united in their resistance to the oppressive Western project of modernity. In this way the subaltern becomes international in scope, academics around the world working on various identitarian emancipation projects would be able to provide the intellectual leadership needed to uncover the West’s attempts to ‘colonize the minds’<sup>5</sup> of the subaltern groups. On the ground, social movements representing the subaltern rationalities of culture and tradition-based hierarchies of knowledge would lead the way in manifesting alternative visions of modernity (Nanda, 2001, p. 168). These alternative modernities would not be required to undergo the social and cultural transformations prescribed by the Western vision. These groups would become modern on their own terms, embodying and acting out their own autonomous historical trajectories, with any claim to a universal logic governing the process of modernization being completely thrown out (Nanda, 2001, p. 168). It is important to note again that this is very different from the socialist and communist vision for development which seeks a transformation in social organization through class agency. What these theorists see in the

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<sup>4</sup> Victim here meaning victim of the Western development project.

<sup>5</sup> This idea of mind colonization has become somewhat of a trope in modern academia and even common parlance, but for a thorough exposition and articulation see Nandy (1983).

‘new social movements’ is the potential to resist the epistemic encroachment of Western modernity, and to preserve the autonomous spaces needed for alternative modernities to flourish.

What seems to make the Western development project illegitimate then, is its attempt to impose its own rationality on other groups through a form of paternalism. This Western rationality cannot provide content to the real needs and desires of the subaltern groups. Any such attempt is merely the replacement of the needs and desires of the subaltern with those of the West. This is essentially the argument of Cowen and Shenton (1996) who describe the Western project of development as a form of ‘trusteeship’. Trusteeship for Cowen and Shenton is “the intent which is expressed, by one source of agency, to develop the capacities of another. It is what binds the process of development to the intent of development” (1996, p. ix). Cowen and Shenton take issue with the way that the Western powers who have championed the cause of development are not accountable to the populations over which their power is exercised:

Development doctrine becomes jargon when there is both distance and disjunction between the intent to develop and the practice of development; when there is an exercise of power in which the capacity to state the purpose of development is not accompanied by accountability (1996, p. 422).

As Parfitt (2011) notes however, it is not clear that an action in the direction of some valued end could ever be taken without engaging in some form of trusteeship. Cowen and Shenton (1996) write favourably concerning the idea of Amartya Sen’s which defines development as the enlargement of an individual’s capabilities, yet upon further inspection they determine that it inevitably leads to the type of trusteeship that characterized the ‘doctrines of the past’.

it is in the tension between the freedom of a potential future and the necessity of the present that capability, the absolute value, becomes a doctrine of development and essentially that of doctrines of the past (p. 419).<sup>6</sup>

In the above passage the “necessity of the present” is seen to contain and restrict the prospect of free development in the future. When the state acts, it acts in relation to the demands

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<sup>6</sup> In describing the value of ‘capability’ as yet another ‘doctrine of development’ Cowen and Shenton mean to suggest that it is yet another form of trusteeship. As evidenced in this passage: “In development doctrine, development and trusteeship are a part of each other; without trusteeship there is no development doctrine” (1996, p. 54).

placed on it by the necessity of the present and not in relation to a vision of free development. Examples of these demands given by Cowen and Shenton are famine, war, or competition between nations (p. 420). In this conceptualization the state acts to “defend the loss of productive force from the threat of the present” (p. 420). So even in pursuing a policy for the purpose of enhancing the capabilities of individuals in a population, the state must restrict the character of that purpose in such a way as to preclude certain capabilities which do not respond to the necessities of the present. It could be argued here that the value of a postmodern approach to development, utilizing the discourses of non-state and non-Western subjects, is that these groups do not occupy the same position in this situation as that of the state, and therefore do not have to make the same concessions. However, this interpretation misses an important point. It is not obvious that it is the unique position of the state which causes its inevitable lapse into trusteeship, it is the fact that any evaluative judgement regarding the content of development inevitably bears the marks of historical contingency and is as a consequence, subject to the limiting factors of present conditions. To imbue some theory or policy with value in regard to the pursuit of development means to constrain the prospect of free development in the future by mistaking relative values born out of historical and present necessity with an absolute standard. In other words, to make a truth claim about the value of some actual or proposed action in pursuit of development is to engage in a form of trusteeship (Parfitt, 2011, p. 453). On this account, all attempts to form knowledge for the purpose of guiding action are inherently oppressive.

It is no wonder then that populism has been a natural ally of the post-development school. To find a legitimate basis for action that avoids a lapse into a relationship of trusteeship between decision-makers and ‘the people’ has been a central focus of these scholars. The idea that the knowledge structures of subaltern movements are ‘natural’, ‘eternal’, or ‘innate’, and that they represent the collective popular-will of a given people is an attempt to subvert the idea of trusteeship altogether. These movements represent the autonomous and untainted needs and desires of ‘the people’, untainted by the scourge of domination and power. As Watts (1995) notes:

Populism is here understood not only as a development strategy – that is to say, in terms of small-scale, efficiency, and a broad anti-urban thrust against the ravages of industrial capitalism (Kitching 1980) – but also as a particular sort of politics in which

an effort is made to manufacture a collective national-popular will (Laclau 1977) (p. 58)

Cited in Watts' passage above is the work of Ernesto Laclau. Laclau is a well-known postmodern thinker with a particular focus on political and social emancipation (see Frilli, 2014). Significant for the post-development theorists, he provides a theoretical basis for the legitimacy of the aims of populist movements. For Laclau, Populist traditions "constitute the complex of interpellations which express the 'people'/power bloc contradiction as distinct from a class contradiction" (Laclau, 1977, p. 167). Populist traditions are here described as being the "ideological crystallization" of resistance to oppression *in general*, as opposed to being constitutive of particular class ideologies themselves (Laclau, 1977, p. 167). Rather than consistent and organized discourses, these populist traditions constitute "mere elements"<sup>7</sup> which, nevertheless, can exist only *in articulation* with class discourses (Laclau, 1977, p. 167). The utility in this move is that these 'elements' are longer lasting and more durable than particular class ideologies. Indeed, for Laclau, they are "the residue of a unique and irreducible historical experience and, as such, constitute a more solid and durable structure of meanings than the social structure itself" (1977, p. 167). Laclau here goes beyond Foucault in his account of the essential contingency of discourse. This distinction is an important one and it is worth taking some time to understand it.

Laclau has criticized Foucault's account of discourse theory for its failure to make the ontic/ontological distinction necessary to rid discourse of any notion of positivity (Laclau in Hansen & Sonnichsen, 2014, p. 261). For Foucault, Laclau argues, discourse is merely "a regional area of the social" (Ibid). What this means is that for Foucault, a discourse is assumed to exist as a fixed totality and can be known by reference to its ontic properties.

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production (Foucault, 1978b, p. 194).

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<sup>7</sup> An element as Laclau uses the term is a type of linguistic sign which does not have a fixed meaning until it is articulated in relation to other signs. This idea has its roots in Heideggerian philosophy by way of Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan. See the section 'Radical Scepticism and *Deonstruktion*' for a discussion of the philosophical roots of this perspective.

Foucault's assertion of the 'reality' of this production of the individual subject and of "domains of objects and rituals of truth" means that when he deconstructs the social totality, he merely dissects it into a number of smaller totalities and shows how power relations were implicated in its construction (Laclau in Hansen & Sonnichsen, 2014, p. 262). What he fails to do is provide any account of how that meaning was created in the first place, and, consequently how it might be destabilized and reconstituted to produce a different meaning over the course of time. This, Laclau suggests, means that he is unable to adequately account for moments of change.

In order to explain change, you have to go through the radical contingency of a regime of truth. But for him, a regime of truth is some kind of positivity, i.e. it is simply there. So when change happens, it is seen as something like a sudden event, not something that was immanent in the truth regime itself, something that was eroding the regime of truth from within (Laclau in Hansen & Sonnichsen, 2014, p. 262).

This criticism is similar to the charge of performative contradiction made against Foucauldian discourse theory mentioned earlier. Parfitt (2011) criticized Foucault's theory on the grounds that it is "characterized by a withering scepticism that renders the ontological unavailable to us. It's lack of a depth analysis deprives it of any purchase on the real, which means that it is unable to authoritatively critique actual or proposed development policies" (p. 447). Parfitt also points out that Foucault fails to adequately theorize the relationship between agency and structure, that is, he overdetermines the role of power (structure) and leaves no room for human agency (p. 447). And indeed, Laclau criticizes Foucault in a similar vein for failing to make the ontic/ontological distinction and take seriously the essential contingency of discourse construction. Laclau, however, *does* make this distinction and it is in this way that he is able to overcome the critiques levelled at Foucault.

What is ontologically decisive for Laclau is the "area of undecidability" between alternative truth claims (Laclau in Hansen & Sonnichsen, 2014, p. 261-262). Recognition of this area of undecidability shifts our focus to the processes by which a discourse is formed and by which it achieves dominance over other discourses. This goes beyond just a consideration of the role power relations play in determining which discourses will become privileged. It considers how *elements* become connected through articulation to form discourses, that is, it considers the process by which experience (both historical and present) and affect produce the discourses that govern social life (Dabirimehr & Fatmi, 2014, p. 1284). For Laclau, then, all



discourses are created out of, and so remain contingent upon, the area of undecidability. This means that the identity of any discourse depends on the particular connections formed between different elements of lived experience and affect. Importantly, these connections are socially constructed through the act of articulation and, therefore, are able to be re-articulated to constitute a new discursive identity (Dabirimehr & Fatmi, 2014, p. 1284). This account offers a far more compelling and nuanced account of the potential for social change than Foucault manages. Laclau's theory is a complex one and a thorough unpacking of it is outside the scope of this thesis<sup>8</sup>. It is, however, important to understand that it is his ideas which form the basis of much post-development scholarship in the contemporary era. One clear example of this is worth briefly describing.

Ziai (2004) provides a very useful description of the critiques of the post-development approach and makes the effort to distinguish between two different strains of post-development thinking: *Neo-populist*, and *Sceptical*

Ziai points out that many of the critiques levelled at post-development theory focus on the theories which are associated with the neo-populist variety and not so much with the sceptical. These critiques include charges that much post-development theory supports an enabling environment (that is, a potentially weak and non-interventionist state) for a neo-liberal order (see Pieterse, 2000, p. 184); that it does not adequately allow for the rational critique of traditional, and often patriarchal, cultural hierarchies (see Nanda, 1999, p. 6; 2001, p. 165-167; Kiely, 1999); that it inevitably leads to a relationship of trusteeship (see Cowen & Shenton, 1996, p. 470); and that they are all critique and no construction (see Pieterse, 2000, p. 188). Some scholars such as Brass (2014) have suggested that this has meant that "they have as a result espoused theoretical positions (peasant essentialism, the innateness of nationalism, the desirability of grassroots ethnic empowerment, rural tradition as mobilizing discourse) that are no different from those advocated historically by populism" (p. 193)<sup>9</sup>. Ziai (2004) admits that in many cases these critiques are justified but suggests this is not because post-development as a whole has serious problems, rather it is because within post-development two conflicting discourses can be identified, a neo-populist discourse, and a sceptical (Ziai, 2004, p. 1052). He makes the assertion that critiques have focussed extensively on the neo-populist branch and not the more sceptical discourse (p. 1053). The

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<sup>8</sup> Although see Chapter 3 for an account of its epistemological lineage.

<sup>9</sup> See also Hettne (1995) for a related discussion on post-development's connection to populism.

abovementioned critiques do not apply in the same way to the sceptical discourse because of its roots in the ‘anti-essentialist’ perspective of postmodern philosophy (Ziai, 2004, p. 1054). From this perspective, a rejection of development implies that there really *is* some unequivocal definition of development that could be rejected, and, by implication, that there could be another post-development definition on the other side. For the sceptical variant, however, the point is not to deal in positive concepts about what development may or may not *be*. The purpose is to create the conditions for a transfer of power to members of society so that they may define the problems they wish to solve and the goals they wish to achieve (Ziai, 2004, p. 1054).

The unwillingness to define ‘development’ in a normative sense is typical of the postmodern rejection of the principle of representation, the principle of ‘speaking for others’. The consequence of adopting this perspective is, however, rarely reflected upon in post-development literature: it becomes impossible to reject ‘development’, because the signifier cannot be fixed to a specific signified (p. 1054).

This sceptical discourse of post-development, Ziai suggests, can be interpreted as a project of “Radical Democracy” (2004, p. 1056). Radical democracy is a concept described in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. They describe radical, or plural, democracy as an attempt to deepen the democratic revolution by way of extending the democratic struggles for equality and liberty “to a wider range of social relations (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. xvi). Ziai (2004) suggests that the post-development project follows this formulation in the sense that it “tries to extend struggles for self-determination in the South to seemingly benign efforts aiming at ‘development’ and in general to various structures of modern societies (state, market, science)” (p. 1056). Laclau and Mouffe’s conception of democracy and its constituent values have their philosophical grounding in the postmodern philosophy of scholars such as Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan (see Hansen and Sonnichsen, 2014, p. 262). Radical democracy posits a world in which there are a “polyphony of voices, each of which constructs its own irreducible discursive identity” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. 175). For Laclau and Mouffe there is no discourse of the universal, and there is no assumption that it is possible to have access to the truth. As they say, “the epistemological niche from which the ‘universal’ classes and subjects spoke has been eradicated” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. 175). The abandoning of this epistemological niche is significant because it means that the potential spaces for social struggle extend well beyond the traditional Marxist categories of

class and economic relations. Laclau and Mouffe make clear that their radical democracy still includes the traditional Marxist goal of the abolition of capitalist relations of production, what they call 'the socialist dimension' (p. 176), but they reject the notion that important social antagonisms and sites of resistance to oppression are exhausted within the traditional Marxist paradigm. Social antagonisms and sites of resistance can occur in any and all regions of the social. This may include the traditional Marxist categories of economic and class relations, but can also extend to others such as cultural, epistemological, sexual, racial, and many more. Social change is here understood as non-deterministic and indeterminate. Important antagonisms and sites of resistance are constructed discursively, and this means that the number of antagonisms is indeterminate. As Laclau and Mouffe describe it, radical democracy is:

a form of politics which is founded not upon dogmatic postulation of any 'essence of the social', but, on the contrary, on affirmation of the contingency and ambiguity of every 'essence', and on the constitutive character of social division and antagonism (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. 176-177).

When this idea conceptualization of politics is applied to international development sceptical post-development theory is the result.

sceptical post-development could be seen as a manifesto of radical democracy in the field of 'development' policy and theory. Its main achievement can be described in the terminology of Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 193) as follows: it extends social conflictuality to the area of development policy and development aid through reformulating relations of subordination implicit in development discourse as relations of oppression (Ziai, 2004, p. 1057).

Within the post-development-as-radical-democracy perspective there is a very different understanding of international development, or to be more precise, a resistance to the idea that there is a fixed object that can be understood. According to this perspective, the meaning of development is in a constant state of flux, always being constructed and created out of discourse. As Laclau & Mouffe note, "Discursive discontinuity becomes primary and constitutive" (p. 175). For these theorists, the project of post-development consists in unlocking the emancipatory potential of various social antagonisms and sites of resistance to oppression. In a very clear example of how this perspective has influenced the post-development perspective, Banuri (1990) has described progress as the "growing awareness of oppression" (p. 95).

Ziai (2004) concedes that it is crucial to be aware of the dangers of reactionary populism, but also asserts that this should not mean that the emancipatory potential of post-development in its sceptical form should be overlooked. Populist movements then, as understood by Laclau, go some way in the direction of transcending the constraints imposed on action by the 'necessities of the present' (pace Cowen and Shenton (1996)). Escobar (1995) hints at this when he suggests that "Even if popular knowledge and politics are in continuous relation to the state, they nevertheless may have their own rationality and rules of operation" (Escobar, 1995, p. 220). They are the articulated elements of the irreducible needs and desires of 'the people' in their purest form, and as such, they provide "an important counterweight to unfettered progressivist belief, and to this extent they have constituted a pronounced undertow in the larger current of developmentalism" (Watts, 1995, p. 58). If we accept the epistemological assumptions that undergird the approach of Laclau & Mouffe, they provide a powerful standpoint from which the post-development theorists can critique the traditional project of international development.

#### [Back to the Mainstream:](#)

While the post-development school has concentrated mostly on the emancipatory potential of civil society and populist social movements, mainstream development since the 1990's has been characterized by a return to a focus on the state (Mckay, 2012, p. 76). Authors such as Tanzi (2011) and Bremmer (2010) have focussed on the role the state plays in mediating economic affairs and other such as Fukuyama (2004) have concentrated on the state institutional capacity and its relationship to political stability. Part of the reason for this shift was a recognition that neo-liberal policies had been a failure. As Mckay notes;

Markets unaided cannot be relied on to deliver the benefits of development since market failures are endemic, even in developed countries. This lesson is certainly being heeded in a wide range of countries where various kinds of 'state capitalism' have been established (2012, p. 76).

In a similar vein Bremmer (2010) writes:

Aware of the economic power of capitalist systems but unwilling to trust the operations of uncontrolled markets, several countries are using carefully regulated

markets to create wealth but are ensuring that the funds are used as the government sees most appropriate (Bremmer 2010).

Another factor in this shift was the continued focus on the inequalities caused by capitalist growth. The equality which the liberal capitalist order supports was seen as merely a formal equality which fades away very quickly in practice when most of the wealth and resources end up in the hands of only a small number of people. Continuing along the line of thought which was started by Dudley Seers, within international development discourse it was increasingly recognized that to limit the idea of liberty to the absence of state intervention in economic affairs was not sufficient. When inequality becomes severe enough, the individuals who occupy the bottom rung of society become dispossessed of their liberty. Liberty in this sense means the ability of the individual to determine his own actions. To have the power to pursue one's own ends. This is not guaranteed merely by ensuring the type of minimal government prescribed by the classical liberal tradition. Liberal scholars then were left with the job of determining exactly what constitutes true liberty.

This expanding conception of liberty can be seen as one of the reasons that development thought by the 1990's had begun to return to a focus on the role of the state. If development consists in the 'realization of the potential of human personality' (pace Seers) and this has been shown to be unachievable following classical liberal prescriptions, the state would need to take on a greater role in regulating human affairs.

If the state was back in, then so was the method by which society could be shaped with reference to certain normative ideals. This moment in development thought and practice represented a chance to give development "a human face" (Cornia, Jolly, & Stewart, 1987). Those theorists who rejected the idea that development could be reduced to measurements of economic growth found a new way in when in 1990 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) released the UNDP Human Development Report 1990. Development was reconceptualized by the UNDP as 'Human Development' defining it as "a process of enlarging people's choices" (UNDP, 1990).

The UNDP's Human Development report relied heavily on the work of Amartya Sen who is perhaps most famous for his book 'Development as Freedom'. Sen proposed that when thinking about freedom and development we should take what he calls a 'capabilities approach'. Sen recognises that a constitutive element of development is the overcoming of

the “remarkable deprivation, destitution and oppression” present to varying levels in all parts of the world (Sen, 2001, pg. xi). Sen shows his liberal leanings by suggesting that it is individual agency which will ultimately be relied upon in countering these afflictions, but he also adds an important caveat. For Sen, individual agency is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to us. Since this is the case, individual agency cannot be viewed separately from the forces which conspire to constrain it. In order for real development to occur then, it would have to be defined in terms of the expansion of those freedoms required for the expression of individual agency (Sen, 2001, p. xii). The work of both Seers and Sen represents a powerful revision and extension of the concept of freedom as it relates to international development. It gave rise to a large amount of literature which aimed to determine the different ‘well-being dimensions’ and ‘basic capabilities’ which need to be satisfied in order for development to occur (McGillivray, 2012, p. 37-38). The central liberal tenet of respect and regard for the individual agent was most definitely alive and well in these discussions, however the multidimensional nature of this conception of development made it hard to define, measure, evaluate and apply. As McGillivray (2012) notes:

“The issue of how to weight or assign relative degrees of importance to well-being or quality of life outcomes is a huge issue in the assessment of development levels and trends. In an ideal world, we would have the scientific information to be able to weight these outcomes. But we do not” (p. 42).

Having broken free from a purely economic understanding of development, the range of ideas that could conceivably be involved in the now multidimensional process of development grew dramatically. What became clear is that any decisions made about how to pursue development, especially at the international level, would have to be made based on explicit value judgements. As Sen (2001) puts it, “Since our freedoms are diverse, there is room for explicit valuation in determining the relative weights of different types of freedoms in assessing individual advantages and social progress” (p. 30). Recognition of the inevitable evaluative dimension involved in the pursuit of development has meant that any development theory which makes claims of universal truths, methods or standards will be met with immediate suspicion. If individual freedoms and capabilities are socially constructed, then they cannot be universal. The post-development school too has been influential and very vocal about the contingency of values. Cultures provide a hierarchy of value through which

we assess the relative importance of different well-being or quality of life outcomes. On this understanding, one culture presenting their hierarchy of values as a universal standard which should be acknowledged and acted upon everywhere betrays an imperial attitude.

Responses to this line of thought were varied. Scholars like Sen and his followers would suggest that the universal aim of unlocking the potential of the individual was a universal normative aim, but that in its practical manifestation policies and practices would have to be adapted to the particular contexts and cultures of the intended target. For others such as the post-development scholars, there is a much deeper distrust of the idea of an institution of international development, even one that's purported aim is to provide conditions for the realization of individual potential.

Epistemologically, development seems to have become confused. There has been a loss of confidence in the universal applicability of liberal principles, and the concept of freedom has been expanded to a point where it is not easy to agree exactly what should and shouldn't be concluded. One of development's brightest minds Amartya Sen has even said that "individual freedom is quintessentially a social product" (2001, p. 31). This suggests that there is an inevitable evaluative dimension to development. Having been weakened by a sustained critique by the post-development school liberalism is no longer in a position where it can unselfconsciously express its values as universal. If we are to take this situation seriously what is required is an examination at the level of epistemological assumptions.





# CHAPTER THREE

### Epistemology and the Limits of Reason:

At the end of the previous chapter, it was suggested that perhaps the central lesson to learn from the development story so far is that ideas about what development *is* and how it is best pursued are dependent on the explicit value judgements of people who occupy relevant decision-making positions. These decision-making positions are extremely diverse, ranging from those political, economic, and cultural elites who have a more direct and observable impact on the institutional form that development takes, all the way down to individuals who hold positions of power only in relation to the day-to-day activities which constitute their private and public lives. An argument of this thesis is that these evaluative judgements, no matter what level they are made at, can be usefully analysed in relation to underlying epistemological assumptions which serve to influence actors in both thought and action.

The remainder of this thesis seeks to explore the problem of ‘knowledge’ production in regard to the process of development. I wish to take seriously the idea that the institution of international development has been irrevocably characterized and shaped by the West’s exercise of power over the rest of the world, and furthermore, that this exercise of power has occurred in the form of discourse and knowledge construction. If development thought has shifted into a ‘post-development era’, it is important that some effort is made to clearly articulate what is being left behind. The idea of modernity, which has unquestionably been provided content by the experience and epistemological categories of the enlightenment-inspired liberal West, permeates development discourse, and in many cases is seen as the standard by which progress towards development should be measured. However, development’s inevitable evaluative dimension, and the ideological conflict it gives rise to, has left us questioning the foundations upon which the institution of international development has been built. The idea that there is a common core to the transition to modernity, and that all societies, although mediated by cultural idiom, will go through similar cultural, social and political changes is not taken as a given. If this is the case then this has great implications for the formulation of knowledge about development and thus, action in pursuit of it.

This first part of this chapter seeks to understand the epistemological foundations of liberalism as a philosophy of development. The work of a number of great liberal philosophers is drawn on in order that the core assumptions of liberal epistemology can be identified. The magnitude, complexity and breadth of all of their work would be impossible

to capture within the confines of this thesis and so it is important to note that the accounts of the work of these scholars is necessarily limited. The purpose of this work is not to serve as an authority on the history of philosophy, but rather to bring a philosophical perspective to the study of international development.

## Part 1:

### Liberalism:

As will be shown, central to the philosophy of liberalism is the role of human reason in producing accurate knowledge about the world. Reason's competence in regard to scientific exploration and manipulation of the natural world has been evidenced by the dramatic technological advancements made since the development of the scientific method in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The idea that the rational intellect and scientific enquiry have utility for solving social problems is even acknowledged, if only implicitly, by some of the more stringently critical development theorists such as Arturo Escobar.

One must also acknowledge, however, that when the pill is already bitter, running water, health posts, and the like may mean real improvements in people's living conditions. This should be recognized, while realizing at the same time that these changes enter into an ongoing situation of power and resistance. (Escobar, 1995, p.145).

Others such as Alvares (1992) make a distinction between 'real knowledge' and mere 'information'.

The most that can be said of information is that it is but knowledge in degraded, distorted form. Science could have been critically understood not as an instrument for expanding knowledge, but for colonizing and controlling the direction of knowledge, and consequently human behaviour, within a straight and narrow path conducive to the design of the project. (Alvares, 1992, p. 256)

What these critical theorists suggest is that the ability of science and the rational intellect to form objective knowledge cannot crossover into the realm of morality and value. In other words, rationality cannot provide content to normative categories. Any truth claim

concerning the universal applicability or rightness of some normative claim is merely a mask for the particular interests of the group by which they are advocated. It is for this reason that Escobar (as above) is able to simultaneously accept that the scientific method may have utility in terms of 'running water, health posts, and the like', and that these positive benefits associated with modernity must also be questioned and critiqued based on their connection with power relations. On this account, the world of human value is impervious to the rational intellect and the scientific method. To insist otherwise is (pace Alvares) to attempt to colonize and control the direction of knowledge with the aim of controlling the behaviour of other groups.

The aim of the following discussion of liberal philosophy is to understand the arguments made by liberal philosophers concerning the relationship between reason and knowledge of universal human values.

#### The Roots of Liberalism:

Determining exactly how deep the roots of Liberal thought penetrate into the depths of history is no easy task. Some scholars find purchase in the idea that it was as a result of the development of Christian moral intuitions concerning the divinity of the individual that Liberal ideas gained a foothold in political thought. Indeed, John Locke who is considered by many to be the 'Father of Liberalism' (Korab-Karpowicz, 2010, p.291) was Christian himself, and in his thought, God provided the basis for the rights of individuals to life, liberty, health and property.

The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone: and reason which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions....  
(Locke, 1764, 2.6)

Modern Liberalism no longer rests explicitly on the religious foundations evident in the writings of Locke but the ideas that Locke built on that foundation are still very much evident in modern secular Liberal thought.

## Grotius, Natural Law and Right Reason

As the father of Liberalism, John Locke would appear to be the correct place to start if we are to understand the philosophical bases of Liberal thought. In order to understand Locke's work however, it is necessary to briefly provide some context to his ideas. In particular, the idea of natural law. Just as Locke is known as the 'Father of Liberalism', Hugo Grotius has been called "The Father of Natural Law" (See Vreeland, 1917). It is important to gain an understanding of Natural Law theory, as it plays a major role in Locke's political philosophy. Grotius in particular represents a major shift in theorizing about natural law and his innovations in the area undoubtedly had an influence on Locke's work.

The main innovation attributed to Grotius' elucidation of natural law stems from his departure from what is called a 'voluntarist' conception of natural law. According to voluntarism, all normative categories, that is moral categories such as goodness or justice, gain their content as a result of an act of volition on the part of God himself (Miller, 2018, p.3).

Grotius ascribed to this view early on in his thinking (e.g. in Grotius, 1950), but began to stray away from it in his famous work *De jure belli ac pacis* (*On the Law of War and Peace*). In *De jure* Grotius contradicts the voluntarism present in his earlier work, stating that:

What we have been saying would have a degree of validity even if we should concede [*etiamsi daremus*] that which cannot be conceded without the utmost wickedness, that there is no God, or that the affairs of men are of no concern to him. Instead of emerging from or being otherwise dependent on God, the fundamental principles of ethics, politics and law obtain in virtue of nature. (Grotius, 1950(b), Prol. II)

On this understanding, normative categories gain their content in virtue of nature itself as opposed to being dependant on God. This is a significant step in the history of ethical thought as it gives credence to the idea that all the normative and ethical information required to guide our conduct as humans can be found through an examination of human nature itself. In terms of how we can gain knowledge of natural law, Grotius suggests that it is through the application of right reason. On this view, "The law of nature is a dictate of right reason,

which points out that an act, according as it is or is not in conformity with rational nature, has in it a quality of moral baseness or moral necessity; and that, in consequence, such an act is either forbidden or enjoined” (Grotius, 1950b, 1.10.1). Grotius’ theory of natural law represents the beginnings of a secular justification and source of moral conduct, emphasizing the essence of human nature as being primarily rational and social. Traditional natural law theories had relied on appeals to the supernatural in order to provide content and justification for normative categories. Grotius instead found both content and justification in “the essential traits implanted in man” (Grotius, 1950b, Prol. 12). The content which Grotius suggests constitutes natural law can be usefully boiled down to two essential properties: 1) Self-Preservation and 2) The need for Society (Miller, 2018, p. 3)

These two properties work in unison to moderate the excesses which both would be prone to on their own. Because humans must constantly be on guard against threats to their self-preservation, they must favour conditions which allow them the freedom to preserve their livelihood. However, because no society could endure if all individuals blindly pursued their self-interest at all cost, humans are endowed with a social impulse which allows them to temper their drive for self-preservation in order to engage in pro-social behaviour. Humans are obligated to act in accordance with the natural law (defined in terms of the above two essential properties) because not to do so would be inconsistent with their nature as rational beings (Miller, 2018, p. 3). The idea here is that to act in a manner contrary to this would be to act in a manner that could not meaningfully be termed human. Being endowed with the capacity for action in accordance with right reason, human failure to act in accordance with that reason is a failure to adhere to the natural law inherent in human nature.

Related to this conceptualization of obligation as it relates to rational action is Grotius’ definition of rights. Up until Grotius’ time the idea of a right was not seen as something that inhered in individuals. That is, it did not denote a certain capacity or power held by an individual which could be exercised without fear of moral or legal sanction (Miller, 2018, p. ). The idea of right was applied to actions or situations rather than persons. There is still an objective moral standard of behaviour which humans are obligated to adhere to, but this is not because individuals have inherent and inalienable rights. Instead, it is because we are obligated to act in a manner consistent with the objective standard of natural law. ‘Right’ then is objective in the sense that it is the object of an act which is obligated under natural law.

Grotius' innovation consisted in his conceptualization of right(s) as something that could inhere in each individual, endowing them with the means and power to engage in certain moral tasks. Grotius' then, espouses a theory of 'subjective right' (see Bull et al., 1990, p.31). Grotius was not completely unique in pursuing and elucidating this conception of right(s) but he is one of the most well-known and influential.

Grotius' work on natural law and right(s) had a significant impact on the development of liberal political thought. Two implications of Grotius' thought are worth noting here. First is his suggestion that through an examination of human nature, which is essentially rational, self-preserving and social, we can provide content to our normative categories. This is significant as it does not require, although it does not exclude, an appeal to a volitional deity. The capacity for right reasoning which inheres in individuals can then provide the means by which the natural law of man can be instituted and upheld in human relations. Secondly, his conceptualization of right(s) as subjective rather than objective means that individuals can meaningfully be said to have, or own, rights (powers to). If this is indeed the case, then a logical extension would be that individuals, acting in accordance with right reason, could choose to give their rights to a ruler or imbue them in social institutions. It is in this idea that Grotius found a novel solution to the problem of accounting for the legitimacy of state power. Rather than deriving authority from God or through sheer military might, the state could be said to come about as a result of the wilful decisions of individuals to cede their inherent power as right-holders to a ruling body.

It is difficult to determine just how much of an influence Grotius was on the next generation of political theorists, or how much his work can be seen as an early manifestation of what would eventually become social contract theory, but what cannot be doubted is that in Grotius' work it is possible to see some of the seeds which would eventually give rise to the philosophy of political liberalism.

### [John Locke, Reason and Legitimate Government](#)

John Locke is often termed 'The Father of Liberalism' because it is in his work that the various philosophical innovations that had been occurring during the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup>

centuries were organized into a more consistent philosophy. Although some of the more technical aspects of both Locke's, and the aforementioned Grotius' work differ in a number of ways, the similarities in the overall picture of the world that emerged out of their work contributed to the liberal worldview that would come to dominate the political landscape long after their respective deaths. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Locke's philosophy has a very clear and important theological aspect, and this must be grappled with in order to gain a full understanding of the world according to Locke, and what has become the world according to modern liberal thought.

A foundational idea of Locke's is that humans are, at their base, the property of God. As such, humans are:

...sent into the world by his order, and about his business; they are his property, whose workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one another's pleasure: and being furnished with like faculties, sharing all in one community of nature, there cannot be supposed any such subordination among us, that may authorize us to destroy one another, as if we were made for one another's uses, as the inferior ranks of creatures are for our's.  
(Locke, 1764, Chap. 2 Sec. 6)

In this passage, Locke establishes the equality of all individuals under God. Every individual is placed on earth imbued with a divine purpose which ought not to be contradicted by the mere human purposes of other individuals. Associated first and foremost with this divine purpose is survival. For whatever purpose God has created humans for, survival is the most basic condition by which that purpose can be satisfied. And in order to survive, individuals must be entitled to the means by which their survival can obtain. For Locke, these prescriptions constitute a Law of Nature which operates and is obligatory on everyone even in a state of nature in which there is no impartial government or political power with the means to enforce it. Locke asserts that this is the case because the law of nature reveals itself to us by virtue of our capacity to reason about our situation:

and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions (Locke, 1764, Chap 2. Sec. 6)



This idea is similar to Grotius' assertion that through the exercise of right reason humans are able to derive the law of nature, or the absolute moral principles, by which their social lives should be organized. Thus, for Locke, even in a state of nature individuals are for the most part able to use their capacity for reason to conduct their affairs in accordance with the law of nature. It is in this sense that Locke sees human beings as being naturally social. Through reason, all have access to knowledge concerning right conduct. Locke once again makes a theological appeal to God's will in order to justify the obligation to act in accordance with right reason.

Similar to Grotius' earlier writings, Locke can be seen as a voluntarist in terms of natural law. Humans have an obligation to act in accordance with natural law because it is willed by God. As the property of God, humans are beholden to the purposes for which he prescribes. Being so compelled by the divine and eternal will of God, all that is left is for natural law to become known. For Locke, this knowledge is acquired through the human capacity to reason. Some scholars however (see Strauss, 1953; and for a discussion of the debate Tuckness, 2018, Sec. 1) have expressed some doubt as to whether Locke can hold both of these views at the same time, also pointing out that even Locke himself admits in his text *The Reasonableness of Christianity* that no one has ever worked out the entire scope of God's natural law through reason alone. The critique is based on the idea that if God's will is the only source of the obligation to obey moral law then this is essentially arbitrary and still leaves open the question of how an obligation to obey God is established in the first place (Tuckson, 2018, Sec.1 Para. 6). Other scholars (see Simmons, 1992; Yolton, 1958; Ashcraft, 1987; Tuckness, 1999) have rejected this perceived weakness in Locke's thought however. Tuckness (1999) in particular solves the problem by suggesting that Locke is a voluntarist, but that his voluntarism consists of two parts, that is 'grounds' and 'content.' This way, the grounds for the obligation to obey natural law still consist in God's will, but the content of that law is 'sufficiently analagous' with human reason that humans are able to reason about what God wills (Tuckness, 2018, Sec. 1 Para. 9). On this reading of Locke, natural law will not seem arbitrary to individual subjects because the divine reason which gives effect to God's will is 'sufficiently analagous' with human reason.

Still, Locke admits, the law of nature can be violated when individuals fail to reason correctly, and this gives rise to the need for a civil government. Justice cannot prevail fully in the state of nature without an impartial judge and enforcement mechanism to carry out the sentences decided upon by that judge. Locke's social contract theory is often contrasted with that of Hobbes in that the need for a governing power arises because the state of nature is characterised by injustice, not by an all-out war of all against all. Once again it is important to note that Locke views humans as being essentially rational and social. For individuals to be willing to endow a governing body with the power to act as an impartial judge as well as in service of the public good, they must be sure that the governing body will protect the natural right of individuals to life, liberty, health and property. In order for the governing body to act as impartial judge in cases where the natural law is broken, it must be entrusted to infringe on the natural rights of the perpetrators in a manner that is proportionate to the crime committed. As far as the governing body is able to perform this role, within the bounds and dictates of natural law it is a legitimate government. An illegitimate government by contrast will violate the natural rights of its subjects for ends other than that of fulfilling the function of independent arbitrator and effector of the public good (see Uzgalis, 2018, Sec. 4.3 and 4.4 for a discussion)

In this part of Locke's thought another similarity to Grotius is evident. For both thinkers, *legitimate* governments could be formed based on the consent of the governed, and this was a natural consequence of the exercise of right reason. Whatever conflicts or injustices arose between individuals, they could be resolved through the application of right reason. The best way to do this is to have an independent arbitrator (the state) who would not succumb to the irrationalities of man's passions. Individuals could organize their behaviour according to the natural law by the creation of institutions for governing society. These institutions were imbued with power not as a result of divine right or through sheer political might, but instead as a result of the consent of right-bearing rational individuals. Over time these institutions would come to make up the various branches of a legitimate government.

John Locke is called the father of Liberalism for a reason. His theory of the natural rights of man, the role of reason and the foundations of legitimate government seemed to solve the problem of tyrannical political power and injustice. His writing was extremely influential on political actors in the Western world, most notably in the U.S. where many of his ideas either

appeared or were implied in the foundational documents of that emerging nation (Griffith, 1997). With the political problem seemingly solved, attention could now be turned to the developmental potential of a society organized according to the principles Locke had laid out. Although not directly responding to or extending on Locke's ideas, another towering figure in Liberal political thought Adam Smith seemed to do just that.

### Adam Smith and the Potential of the Individual

Before delving into the work of Adam Smith it worth mentioning that of the liberal scholars mentioned thus far, none of them would have called themselves liberal, indeed that term was not in common usage during the time in which they were writing. That label has been associated with them posthumously after their ideas became the philosophical bases for what has become the doctrine of political liberalism. The idea that humans have natural rights, that the world is governed by a natural law and that the state receives its legitimate role as independent arbitrator and enforcer of that law through the consent of the governed form the basis of liberal thought as it relates to the political organization of society. The idea of a limited government with political power bounded to certain goals which serve only the individuals who compose the polity was a powerful idea, particularly in the context of 'Age of Enlightenment' thinking which was dominant at the time. Following the scientific revolution in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries there was a new emphasis on and respect for the individual as being a legitimate social critic, and centre of the moral universe. Fundamentally, Liberalism as a political and economic doctrine can be seen as a product of the work of scholars in a particular time and place, all operating under broadly the same assumptions concerning reality; that is of nature as a relatively self-contained unit, and reason as the method by which nature can be known. In the previous era, which can broadly be encapsulated under the heading 'pre-modern', the main source of knowledge about the world came from tradition, faith and the political institutions and elites who constituted the structures which supported those traditions and schools of faith. In what has become known as the 'modern' period, or 'the age of enlightenment' (See White, 1991, p. 2-3 for a discussion of Modernism so described) reason was a competent method by which humans could come to know the objective natural world. As Individuals constitute the unit at which rational observation and manipulation takes place, the individual was, for the first time, endowed with the capacity to form autonomous beliefs about the world and about individual

conduct therein. Supernatural or tradition-based maxims were no longer considered to have ultimate authority over individuals unless individuals could be convinced that there was good reason for such authority.

Grotius' and Locke's ideas concerning the natural rights of individuals make significantly more sense when considered in the context of the philosophical fashion of the day. The fact that reason is a faculty of the individual means that the individual is the ultimate moral unit. The ethical individualism that constitutes both the philosophy of Grotius and Locke is a result of the philosophical naturalism and faith in reason which dominated thought during the enlightenment period. Wherever these fundamental assumptions were applied, the result was sure to contain within it an emphasis on the individual and his capacity for rational thought and action. In morals it produced ethical individualism on the basis that individuals should not be prevented from exercising their rational judgement. In knowledge it produced science and objective truth based on the application of reason to the observation of iterated experience. In politics it produced democracy based on the principles of ethical individualism and recognition of the individual as a legitimate source of social authority. And perhaps most pertinently for Adam Smith, in economics it produced free markets and capitalism based on the principle that individuals should have the autonomy to exercise their own reason in regard to economic affairs. Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* can be seen as an elaboration of the implications of enlightenment philosophy and its championing of reason as both a means to know the world as well as to determine how to act in it.

Despite the fact that Adam Smith was a very profound thinker whose work delves deep into ideas about morality and virtue, his contribution to the Liberal worldview exists in a relatively circumscribed way. Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* is seen by many as the first modern work of economics. Smith's idea of 'The Invisible Hand' is often cited as the first description of Classical Liberal economic theory, and the basis also of the more contemporary neoliberal economic doctrine. Due perhaps to the power of this seemingly simple metaphor for free-market economic organization, Smith's ideas have not been understood within the rich context of both his moral and political philosophy, and instead what is often understood to define Smith's works is an argument for the beneficent consequences of individual's pursuit of naked self-interest. A shallow

understanding of Smith's faith in the free-market makes it an easy target for those opposed to the classical liberal tradition. Whatever merit their critiques have, they should not be so easily drawn from such a profound thinker as Adam Smith. In this brief section an outline of that missing context of Smith's work is provided.

Smith is often credited for being a significant figure in the development of the philosophy of *laissez faire* or free-market economics. At a very general level, the idea of free-market economics is that the interests of both individuals and society are served best by allowing individuals to regulate their own interactions through an unrestrained market economy. Proponents of a free-market economy are often very cynical about the possibility of beneficial government intervention in market processes. By their account, government intervention causes distortions in the flow of the market which often lead to negative outcomes for individuals. The fact that it is possible to talk about the distortion of market forces suggests that without such distortions the market flow maintains some sort of purity. It is in this idea that we meet one of the most significant parts of Adam Smith's arguments; that individuals acting in their own self-interest within the context of an appropriate and minimal state-enforced institutional structure, are at the same time acting in the interest of society at large. Smith states in *The Wealth of Nations*:

By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good. It is an affectation, indeed, not very common among merchants, and very few words need be employed in dissuading them from it (Smith, 2009, pp. 578-579).

It is this idea which connects Adam Smith to the same tradition as both Grotius and Locke, and why it is intelligible to talk about all three as being great Liberal scholars. All three suggested that a legitimate state should be minimal in the sense that it does not transgress natural law or impinge on the natural rights of individuals (for Grotius and Locke), while Smith can be seen as qualifying these ideas about the role of government with a description of the superior productive potential of a society of free individuals.

Where much nuance in Smith's thought has been either overshadowed or missed entirely however, is in his work on morals. Before *The Wealth of Nations* was published, Smith published a dense volume titled *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* which outlined his ideas concerning the human moral experience. It is worth describing some of the ideas which add nuance to the somewhat caricatured version of Smith's 'invisible hand' free-market ideas which are commonly associated with Liberal thought. Foremost of these is the much richer conception of self-interest which characterises Smith's individuals.

Even though Smith's admirable work on morals deserves the attention of all those who champion his later work *The Wealth of Nations*, it is not hard to understand why this aspect of his work has been largely overshadowed. Today, self-interest is commonly understood in terms of the rational pursuit of valued ends by individual actors. This is largely due to the influence of the behavioural revolution which occurred in the humanities after WW2. This approach favoured the use of quantitative methodologies, statistical analysis and an emphasis on rational choice (see Pye, 2006, for a good discussion, particularly in regard to political science; Berkenpas, 2016 for a more detailed analysis; and Hamati-Ataya, 2012 for an overview). For Smith however, self-interest was not so scientifically inclined. Smith's conception of the self is deeply social, and so when it comes to considering self-interest, Smith suggests that the individual's social world and its associated moral values has a huge impact on the behaviour and interests of that individual. For Smith, it is the capacity for imagination and sympathy that allows human beings to consider the feelings of other individuals. Having this capacity, moral considerations are able to enter into behaviour, helping to decide which actions are appropriate in particular situations (Fleischacker, 2017, Sec. 3).

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith paints a complex picture of what it means to live a moral life and how this relates to the individual's pursuit of self-interest. Through a process of socialization, individuals develop an ability to view situations from the perspective of an "impartial spectator" (Smith, 1822, p. 39). Smith's view is that one of our main human drives pushes us to try and share the feelings of others. In this way, we are able to engage in a process of mutual emotional adjustment which aligns our conduct in such a way as to create standards of virtuous behaviour (Fleischacker, 2017, Sec. 2). Interestingly, for Smith, this process of socialization is necessarily imperfect, and it relies on the individual capacity for

free and independent choice to remain useful and up to date. One of the consequences of Smith's highly social conception of morality is that he sees individuals as being in the best position to determine what is or is not appropriate or what is virtuous behaviour in any given situation. Individuals are on the ground, interacting and engaging with one another. They live in the moral landscape and thus have an interest in, and access to, the situations in which moral issues are relevant. Individuals are endowed with the tools of morality (imagination and sympathy giving rise to the *feelings* of the impartial spectator as Smith puts it) and so it is through their own development of proficiency in the use of those tools that society has the best chance of achieving peaceful and prosperous relations. Once a certain level of proficiency is reached the internalized impartial spectator can even be used as a source of moral evaluation for society at large, thus keeping it updated and dynamic.

It is these ideas which make Smith a proponent of limited government and a free-market economic system. For him, individuals must be allowed scope to develop their moral sentiments, for moral conduct is ultimately the responsibility of individuals themselves. As Fleishacker (2017) notes, Smith was suspicious of those members of society with strong political aspirations as it was not clear to him that their moral pronouncements could be more reliable than those of individual actors. For Smith, individuals can do quite a good job on their own of establishing, maintaining and refining moral standards (Fleishacker, 2017, Sec. 5).

What differentiates Smith's work on morality from Locke's is that Smith spends far more effort attempting to show the internal connections and processes by which a moral system works as opposed to justifying the existence of the system itself. In Smith there are not the same appeals to a natural law or the natural rights of individuals as is seen in Locke. The clear respect for the individual that is evident in Smith's work is largely taken for granted, and his focus centres more on how free individuals can or should conduct themselves in order to produce the greatest good for society. Smith's conception of self-interest and how its aggregate can produce a harmonious system is not based on the more positivistic behavioural self-interest which is found in modern libertarian thought. An understanding of both of Smith's great works leaves the reader with the impression that economics is not so easily separable from moral philosophy. It still suggests however, that human conduct can align and

converge in such a way as to achieve harmonious relations among individuals, ultimately leading to the promotion of the good of society.

The extent of Adam Smith's theological commitments have been debated ever since his work was first published (see Hill, 2001; Waterman, 2002; Kennedy, 2011). No statement regarding the truth of Smith's supposed or rejected religious commitments will be made here simply because the metaphysical reality of a divine being who is the author of the universe does not change significantly the ontological structure of the world as described by Smith. Theorists such as Hill (2001) can find plenty of textual evidence in Smith's work to support the claim that there is an important theological aspect to his thought, for example:

But by acting according to the dictates of our moral faculties, we necessarily pursue the most effectual means for promoting the happiness of mankind, and may therefore be said, in some sense, to co-operate with the Deity, and to advance as far as in our power the plan of Providence. By acting other ways, on the contrary, we seem to obstruct, in some measure, the scheme which the Author of nature has established for the happiness and perfection of the world, and to declare ourselves, if I may say so, in some measure the enemies of God. Hence we are naturally encouraged to hope for his extraordinary favour and reward in the one case, and to dread his vengeance and punishment in the other (Smith, 1822, p. 188)

Passages such as this one provide at least rhetorical support for a role for the Divine in Smith's thought. Smith's appeals to theological concepts will be treated here as more of a metaphorical technique in support of the ontological structure of the world he argues for as opposed to a truth claim concerning the metaphysical reality of a deity. In the above passage, Smith suggests that by acting in accordance with human moral faculties we inevitably act out "the scheme which the Author of nature has established for the happiness and perfection of the world...". Stripped of its explicitly religious connotations, this may be understood to mean that there exists a pattern of action which if properly manifested in the world by individuals, leads to a state (of affairs) in which the interests of those individuals are satisfied at all times and nobody wants for nothing. This state of affairs can be more or less perfectly realized but it is, at least in principle, a possibility. As a religious doctrine this idea dates far further back in time than Adam Smith's writing. What is significant about Smith is that he



was able to articulate a vision of this idea using the vocabulary and concepts associated with modern society. With a slightly more nuanced understanding of the metaphysical and epistemological assumptions of enlightenment philosophy, but with a qualitatively consistent implication for action, Smith continued the development of the doctrine of Liberalism which had begun in the writings of the natural rights theorists. Another great liberal thinker, John Stuart Mill, can be seen as having achieved a similar feat in his writings concerning liberty and a utilitarian theory of ethics.

### Mill and Freedom

John Stuart Mill is known for his contribution to the concept of liberty. Liberty for Mill is crucial for the preservation of truth and for the achievement of both personal and social progress. A sophisticated and nuanced thinker, Mill presents in his philosophy a substantive picture of the world and man's place in it. His connection to earlier Liberal thinkers arises through his confidence in reason as both a means to know the world (although Mill's conception of truth and knowledge has a much more inductive and relativistic character than that of the earlier theorists) as well as to determine how to act in it. Mill was a staunch naturalist, seeing the world as basically a self-contained unit which operated according to natural laws. Most significantly, the human mind was not exempt from this picture, itself being part of nature and also subject to natural causal laws.

Much like John Locke before him, Mill was a proponent of the idea of the 'Tabula Rasa' or 'Blank Slate' conception of mind. According to this idea, humans are not born with any innate knowledge. Knowledge is something that is accrued by the individual over time as they have experiences and (for Mill) form associations between those experiences using reason. For Mill then, sense perceptions are the "original data, or ultimate premises of our knowledge" (Mill, 1884, p. 4). We proceed only by making inferences from that original data. And, as Mill asserts, we do this through reasoning inductively. "Inference, consequently all Proof, and all discovery of truths not self-evident, consists of inductions, and the interpretation of inductions" (Mill, 1884, p. 185). One of the problems with Mill's theory of knowledge is that if all knowledge depends on its being inductively derived from sense data, it is not possible to know whether what is believed based on inductive reasoning is *actually*

true or not. Knowledge would, in the end, always be open to revision should an instance occur in which inductively derived conclusions are contradicted. In short, just because it is possible to identify certain regularities in experience, this does not necessarily lead to a world of the type of uniformity which would be required to assert the existence of natural laws. Mill responds to this challenge in two ways.

First, he appeals once again to induction. He argues that because our inductive generalizations tend to be reliable, at least in terms of subjective experience, this is reason enough for to believe that inductive reasoning is an appropriate way to reason about the world and its structure. Mill suggests that “The universe, so far as known to us, is so constituted, that whatever is true in any once case, is true in all cases of a certain description; the only difficulty is, to find what description” (Mill, 1884 p. 201). For Mill, it is a “universal fact” that nature operates in such a way that there is good reason to trust in inductive reasoning about its operations (Mill, 1884, p. 201; also see Macleod, 2018, Sec. 3.2 for a discussion).

In regard to human knowledge of the world, the account of Mill’s described above provides at least a plausible account of the way humans are able to form justified conclusions about the world and the laws that govern it. However for Mill, humans and their minds are subject to these laws also, and so they too therefore must be amenable to empirical study. The point of studying the mind empirically would be to inform ethical standards. Mill sought to answer the question of how humans should act. To provide an answer to this question, Mill makes use once again of his account of inductive reasoning. Just as it is possible to reason about and inductively derive generalisations about the world (natural laws) for which there *is in fact* reason to believe, so too is it possible to reason about and inductively derive desires which there is *in fact* reason to desire (See Macleod, 2014 & Macleod, 2018, Sec. 3.2 for a detailed discussion). For Mill;

Some facts are so perpetually and familiarly accompanied by certain others, that mankind learnt, as children learn, to expect the one where they found the other, long before they knew how to put their expectation into words by asserting, in a proposition, the existence of a connection between those phenomena. No science was

needed to teach that food nourishes, that water drowns, or quenches thirst, that the sun gives light and heat, that bodies fall to the ground (Mill, 1884, p. 208).

In the above passage, Mill explains that in the pursuit of knowledge there are certain facts which must be accepted, at least preliminarily, in order for that pursuit to take place. Indeed, “it is impossible to frame any scientific method of induction, or test of the correctness of inductions, unless on the hypothesis that some inductions deserving of reliance have been already made” (Mill, 1884, pp. 208-209). That some inductions are “deserving of reliance” is fundamental to Mill’s theory of knowledge and to his utilitarian theory of ethics.

Mill’s theory of utilitarian ethics is based on the principle that “actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure” (Mill, 1863, p. 10). In this formulation of the grounds of ethical conduct, humans have what Mill calls ‘natural sentiments’ which incline them to desire pleasure. Mill asserts that moral sentiments are not innate, but that this does not render them any less natural than if they were.

It is natural to man to speak, to reason, to build cities, to cultivate the ground, though these are acquired faculties. The moral feelings are not indeed a part of our nature, in the sense of being in any perceptible degree present in all of us; but this, unhappily, is a fact admitted by those who believe the most strenuously in their transcendental origin. Like the other acquired capacities above referred to, the moral faculty, if not a part of our nature, is a natural outgrowth from it; capable, like them, in a certain small degree, of springing up spontaneously; and susceptible of being brought by cultivation to a high degree of development. (Mill, 1863, p. 44)

It is important to recall Mill’s naturalist and empiricist commitments at this point. Humans do in fact, or at least possess the capacity to, act according to moral principles. And within the confines of a strictly naturalist worldview this would suggest that there is some natural (as qualified above) inclination for humans to engage in prosocial and moral conduct. For Mill, the ability to have regard for the pleasures and pains of others is the most fundamental component of moral conduct, and this is exactly what is required by his principle of utility.

Indeed, this is precisely what gives the utilitarian morality its strength. The moral faculty, with no ultimate principle to guide it, is devoid of content and shape, leaving it vulnerable to whatever arbitrary and potentially mischievous or malevolent forces step in to provide it structure. Mill asserts that if the association of the principle of utility with our moral faculty was entirely an artificial creation then it could be analysed away by the intellect (Mill, 1863, p. 45). Mill's point is that there must be a "natural basis of sentiment" for utilitarian morality because, as experience shows us, humans do in fact act as if they have regard for the pleasures and pains of others. Like the other great Liberal scholars here considered, Mill's conception of human nature is fundamentally social.

The social state is at once so natural, so necessary, and so habitual to man, that except in some unusual circumstances or by an effort of voluntary abstraction, he never conceives himself otherwise than as a member of a body; and this association is rivetted more and more, as mankind are further removed from the state of savage independence. (Mill, 1863, p. 45-46)

Even though it is not innate, humans are still naturally social according to Mill. That the interests of all other individuals in a community should be consulted for determining behaviour becomes an intrinsic part of social life for human beings. Equality and respect for the individual is a natural consequence of this as "Society between equals can only exist on the understanding that the interests of all are to be regarded equally (Mill, 1863, p. 46). It is in this way that Mill suggests the interests of individuals come to be identified and tied up with the interests of the collective. As in the writing of Adam Smith, it is through the individual and his reason which the Liberal scholar approaches the good of the collective.

Much of Mill's reliance on reason and the individual can be attributed to the influence of the ethical individualism present in the work of the great enlightenment thinkers such as those discussed in this section. However, as with most great thinkers, Mill extended, or at least refined and made more prominent, a key concept implicit in the work of those earlier Liberals; truth. In chapter two of his famous work *On Liberty*, Mill makes an impassioned and powerful defence and explication of the importance of "The Liberty of Thought and Discussion". The central argument is that because humans are fallible, individuals should have the widest possible freedom to think and say whatever they feel they have reason to. For

in amongst all the inevitable fallibility in human thought and discussion there may arise a few instances of truth. For Mill, truth is a better guide for action than anything else, and so society as a whole is served if the conditions which make the emergence of truth most likely to occur are supported and maintained.

Complete liberty of contradicting and disproving our opinion, is the very condition which justifies us in assuming its truth for purposes of action; and on no other terms can a being with human faculties have any rational assurance of being right (Mill, 1859, p. 31).

In the above passage Mill deals with the issue of how humans can come to be sure that in their exercising of reason they are reasoning *rightly*. For Mill, to consider which actions are those actions which will produce the greatest amount of pleasure and the least amount of pain, there must be content to that consideration. The importance of truth for guiding action resides in its very existence. If truth exists, and it can be approached through reason, then reason can be used to guide conduct.

What is found in Mill's writing is a well-developed articulation of the practical implications of the shift in epistemology that occurred between the pre-modern and modern periods. In the pre-modern period, the knowledge and methods which were used to guide conduct were principally tradition and faith, backed by an organized hierarchy of authority of some kind. Beginning with the scientific revolution and gaining strength during the enlightenment period was the modern idea that it is through reason that truth can be known. This is not to say that traditional sources and authorities of knowledge such as organized religion were completely done away with. Indeed it could be said of scholars such as Grotius, Locke and even Adam Smith, that their accounting for the co-existence of divine *and* rational laws is evidence of the tension that this new modern way of thinking caused in moral thinking. What did eventually become accepted however, is that the individual's capacity for rational thought meant they should be regarded as a legitimate source of authority concerning decisions about how to act, and a legitimate critic of the traditional centres of authority associated with the pre-modern period.

This idea of truth is as important to the natural rights scholars as it is to Mill. Whether humans are trying to determine the natural laws and commands willed by the Creator, cultivate and refine their natural moral sentiments, or determine which actions promote the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people, the efficacy of those pursuits requires that there *is* an answer; even if it's full realization is not attainable. Mill's extreme naturalism makes the idea of truth particularly important in his utilitarian theory of ethics. Because the world is entirely natural, everything in it is subject to the natural laws. The human mind is also natural therefore, and so it is in principle possible to study empirically human behaviour. Through the application of reason and the empirical study of human behaviour it is then possible to determine which acts or standards of behaviour are those that will produce the greatest pleasure for the greatest number. Studies conducted on this basis only make sense if there is a standard by which they could be judged to be 'right'. The term 'right' here is used as a synonym for 'true' only because the word true tends to connote a more scientific truth which is not easily understood in relation to action. True in this sense means to progress faithfully towards its proper target.

Having gained an understanding of the worldview described by the ideas of four great classical liberal scholars it is time now to turn to a more modern variant which is an outgrowth of the classical tradition. Much of the Liberal worldview can already be gleaned from the classical writers, but it will be helpful to consult a modern variant which deals with international relations.

### [Moravcsik and the Assumptions of Liberalism in IR](#)

Although wearing slightly newer clothes more appropriate to the intellectual climate of the contemporary period, underneath it all Liberalism still shares the fundamental approach to social and political life which characterized the theorists of the classical period. The view of human nature which grounds contemporary Liberal theory is still fundamentally social. It is somehow natural for humans to interact in ways that can broadly be termed social. As has been discussed, this is a result of either a Divine plan of nature or arises directly out of human reason or moral sentiment. This is true for individuals within the context of a national or sub-national group, and it is true also of states operating in the context of a domestic and trans-national society. In the contemporary period, and in the context of state conduct in

international relations, this idea is captured under the umbrella term 'Globalization'. As Moravcsik notes,

Liberals argue that the universal condition of world politics is globalization. States are, and always have been, embedded in a domestic and transnational society, which creates incentives for economic, social and cultural interaction across borders. State policy may facilitate or block such interactions (2010, p. 1 underline in the original).

Moravcsik suggests here that there exists a fundamental interdependence between the interests of different groups and societies. The job of the State then is to regulate globalization in such a way that, as much as is possible, the preferences of the groups who represent the dominant social pressures at the domestic level are satisfied. Different groups at the domestic level have different preferences concerning the way states should manage interdependence at the international level. Those groups apply pressure to states in order to make the preferences which those states bring to bear on international society more closely resemble their own. It is this process of state preference formation which gives rise to the substantive social purposes of states in international society. State preferences are, then, the fundamental cause of state behaviour in world politics (Moravcsik, 2010, p. 1-2).

Opposing the Realist school which posits variations in power as the fundamental cause of state behaviour, Liberalism focusses on variations in socially-determined state preferences (Moravcsik, 2010, p. 2). Once the idea of state preferences as a central focus for explanations of state behaviour has been established, the field of Liberal IR scholarship branches out into different areas depending on the type of preferences studied and the different ways they impact state behaviour. Before these are outlined however, it is important first to establish the underlying assumptions of Liberal theory as it relates to international relations.

Moravcsik suggests that there are two general assumptions underlying Liberal theory:

- 1) Political actors exist in the distinctive environment of international politics, without a world government or any other authority with a monopoly on the legitimate use of force.
- 2) State leaders and their domestic supporters engage in foreign policy for the instrumental purpose of securing benefits provided by (or avoiding costs imposed by) actors outside of their borders, and in making such calculations, states seek to deploy

the most cost-effective means to achieve whatever their ends (preferences) may be.  
(Moravcsik, 2010, p. 2)

The first of these assumptions is common to essentially all theories of international relations, and the appeal to rational action in the second is also widely shared by many IR scholars, except of course for those who operate within a non-rationalist tradition. What makes Liberalism unique according to Moravcsik is the further two assumptions that a) states represent some subset of domestic society, whose views constitute state preferences; and, b) interdependence among state preferences influences state policy (Moravcsik, 2010, pp. 2-4 for a discussion).

Regarding the first of these liberal assumptions, what subset of domestic society the state represents depends very much on the context and nature of the institutions and practices which constitute it. If a state is run by a dictator with overwhelming political and military power, the likelihood that the preferences of that state will be any different to the preferences of that dictator is basically nil. If a state offers broad democratic participation in politics, the preferences of the state will more likely reflect the preferences of those individuals and groups who are able to marshal the greatest amount of political support in their favour. This way of thinking about state behaviour extends the range of variables that can influence state behaviour far beyond considerations of constant concerns such as security, wealth or power. As Moravcsik notes, "Most modern states are not Spartan" (2010, p. 3). The role of a state engaged in international politics is to engage in a process of making constant and complex trade-offs between the various economic, social and political goals imposed on them by the individuals and groups which constitute that society. Those individuals and groups compete against one another in a contest for influence over the social purpose to be acted out in the international sphere by the state. This assumption accounts for the domestic pressures which go into influencing state behaviour. Moravcsik's second assumption above completes the liberal picture by accounting for the external pressures.

With liberal theory asserting the social foundation of state preferences, these preferences are bound to change over time due to the inevitable shifts in economic, social and political configurations within and between states. Because of this fact, the stake that a state will have in any particular trans-national issue will depend greatly on the particular configuration of social pressures exerted at the domestic level at a particular time. That configuration will support certain policies and behaviours and not others depending on the stake that a state



deems itself to have in those matters. It is the distribution and nature of the stakes that states have in particular international affairs that explains state behaviour (Moravcsik, 2010, p. 3). If a state does not have a stake in a particular matter it has no reason to pay any attention or act in response to it. If no social purpose can be attached to a particular matter then there is no impetus for action. State preferences vary in intensity depending on how significant a stake they have in any given matter. A key factor in determining the causes of state behaviour then is not just the domestically determined social purpose, but also what Moravcsik calls 'policy interdependence'. Policy interdependence refers to the extent to which the actions of one state to achieve its policy preferences will impose either costs or benefits upon other states in doing so (Moravcsik, 2010, p.4). This means that the likelihood of either cooperation or conflict arising between states is dependent on the intensity of the underlying preferences held by each state. Each state then, will attempt to realize their preferences concerning the regulation of globalization, always in the context of and under the constraint that other states are attempting to do the same thing. It is in this way that Moravcsik (2010) suggests that "Conflictual goals increase the incentive of political disputes. Convergence of underlying preferences creates the preconditions for peaceful coexistence or cooperation" (p. 4).

Once these assumptions have been established, Liberals then branch off into their different research areas based on the type of preferences studied and the different ways they impact state behaviour. Moravcsik identifies three main categories of Liberal thought: 1) *Ideational Liberalism*; 2) *Commercial Liberalism*; and 3) *Republican Liberalism*.

The type of state preferences studied by ideational liberal theorists are those preferences which arise out of the social identities and values of the dominant individuals and groups in domestic society. The main preferences studied are those which concern the proper purview of legitimate state objectives. A legitimate state objective as referred to here does not entail legitimacy in the sense of being morally justified. The legitimacy of a state objective is determined by the preferences of the dominant actors in domestic society. The identities and values of these dominant actors then become important in providing content to those preferences. It is in this way that Liberals are able to move beyond the traditional Realist focus on security and the distribution of material capabilities. The different sets of social preferences held by states are what drive state behaviour. Security and material power balancing are valued and acted upon only insofar as they are to the preference of dominant domestic social actors. This means that the pursuit or maintenance by one state of its own

conception of legitimate state objectives may cause externalities for others (Moravcsik, 2010, p. 6). Moravcsik identifies preferences concerning *National Identity*, *Political Ideology*, and *Socioeconomic Regulation* as being particularly significant in terms of their impact on state behaviour. The compatibility or incompatibility of preferences concerning the above three issues can spawn both productive cooperation or destructive contention and hostility. When national conceptions of legitimate borders, political institutions, and socioeconomic standards are more compatible, this will mean there are less negative externalities and perhaps even some positive ones. In these situations, peace is preferred by both parties and coexistence and cooperation between them becomes the norm. In other words, relations between states are not zero-sum.

Commercial Liberalism is focussed much more heavily on material and economic interests. The type of preferences studied by Commercial Liberal scholars are those preferences concerning the structure of both the domestic and global economy. Differences in how economies are structured lead to differences in the costs and benefits associated with actor's participation in transnational exchange. Individuals and groups exert pressure on states to structure both the domestic economy and economic relations at the transnational level in such a way that it maximizes the benefits and minimizes the costs associated with trade.

Moravcsik (2010) points out that commercial liberalism is not equivalent to a naïve belief that states acting rationally in response to economic incentives can lead to world peace and prosperity. What commercial liberalism focusses on is "the interplay between aggregate incentives and distributional consequences" (p. 8). If a certain group is able to accrue great economic benefits through the structuring of economic relations in a particular way, they have an incentive to pressure the state to enforce such an order in proportion to the magnitude of the benefits to be obtained. On the other hand, if another group would suffer negative distributional consequences as a result of a particular structuring of economic relations, they have an incentive to pressure the state to overturn or change that structure in proportion to the magnitude of that suffering. It is in this way that commercial and material interests can form a significant part of the preferences and social purposes of states.

While both ideational liberalism and commercial liberalism focus on the domestic social pressures which arise out of the interests and identities of social actors, the third type of state preference identified by Moravcsik, *Republican Liberalism*, focusses on the effect that different forms of political organization have on the transformation of identity and interest-

based preferences into state policies. The central thesis of *Republican Liberalism* is that the nature of political representation at the domestic level is a significant factor in determining which actor's preferences inform state policy, and therefore constitute the social purpose of the state. On this view, state policy is biased toward the preferences of those individuals and groups who are able to acquire political power through whatever representative structures constitute the state's political apparatuses. These can range from representative democratic institutions to the capturing of the state by powerful domestic groups using coercive means. Following this logic, if the representative structure present in a state allows for the identity and interest-based preferences of a narrow sub-section of society to dominate, this will increase the number of negative externalities imposed on other actors within national borders and without. The inverse of this situation would then suggest that if the representative structure present in a state allows for the inclusion of a wide range of identity and interest-based preferences from as many sub-sections of society as possible, the number of negative externalities imposed on other actors will be reduced. The theory behind this second hypothesis is that when the costs of high-risk policies such as war will be borne by a wide-range of actors who all have influence over the preferences expressed in state policy, policies pursuing war will not be preferred. This theory suggests that actors are generally risk-averse, and unless they can be sure that the negative externalities incurred as a result of pursuing a particular policy will not fall on them, they will avoid such policies. Liberalism, then, sees in representative structures which allow for the inclusion of a wide range of preferences in state policy-making, the possibility of peaceful and potentially productive transnational relations. It is this logic that informs the theory of the "Democratic Peace". This theory at its most general level is that states organized according to democratic liberal principles do not go to war with one another. Democratic states, liberals claim, have distinctive preferences as a result of their domestic representative structure which make them uniquely capable of more cooperative and prosocial behaviour.

### The Liberal Worldview:

The preceding discussion has provided a broad overview of the philosophy of liberalism. In order to relate it now to international development it is necessary to draw out the fundamental assumptions and themes which characterize the liberal worldview.

These words of Mill's arguably encapsulate the essence of the liberal philosophy:

As mankind improve the number of doctrines which are no longer disputed or doubted will be constantly on the increase; and the well-being of mankind may almost be measured by the number and gravity of the truths which have reached the point of being uncontested (Mill, 1859, p. 79).

The table below provides a distillation of liberalism's fundamental assumptions as extrapolated from the previous discussion.

Assumptions of Liberalism	
<p><b>1. The world (both physical and social) are governed by laws.</b></p> <p><b>These laws exist because:</b></p> <p>(a) <b>God created them.</b></p> <p>(b) <b>They inhere in the self-contained realm of the Natural World.</b></p> <p><b>(These two options can be held singularly or jointly)</b></p>	<p><b>2. Laws of nature are imbued with normative force by God, or, in the more secular varieties, acquire their normative force by virtue of their accordance with 'right reason' and/or 'natural sentiments'.</b></p>
<p><b>3. The world exists in such a way that humans can, at least in principle, acquire knowledge of its laws.</b></p> <p>a. <b>It is through reason that knowledge can be acquired, and so there must be a relationship between the rational quality of the human mind and the quality of the world itself.</b></p>	<p><b>4. That the laws which govern the world and the human mind partake of the same rational quality means not only that humans can understand worldly events in terms of cause and effect, but also that through rational action humans can create causes in the direction of desired effects.</b></p>

<p>5. <b>Since rational action is a capacity of the individual, the individual is the morally important social unit.</b></p> <p>a. <b>Individuals and their capacity for rational action should therefore be protected and given as much scope for action as is possible.</b></p>	<p>6. Political power then, when it is used, should be used only for the purpose of ensuring the protection of the individual from forces which may inhibit their capacity or scope for individual rational action.</p>
<p>7. <b>There exists a pattern of action which, when embodied by individuals, accords with natural laws in such a way that social relationships are harmonized and the conditions for cooperation and mutual gains are made possible.</b></p>	<p>8. Harmonious social relations entail the absence of conflict and human caused suffering.</p>
<p>9. <b>To the extent that human affairs are characterised by conflict and suffering, this is because of the ignorance and lack of understanding by individuals of how their actions figure in the cause and effect relations which constitute their existence.</b></p>	<p>10. If all that holds humans back from conducting their affairs rationally and in harmony with the natural forces by which they are governed is ignorance and lack of understanding, then the progressive study, discovery and dissemination of the laws of nature will directly correlate with an increase in the well-being and quality of life of all those who live according to the dictates of right reason.</p>

What may be somewhat obscure in the above table is the idea of truth. Concepts such as natural law, universal principles or natural sentiments represent the idea that there *is* in fact truth to be found in the world, and more specifically, behavioural truth. Behavioural truth

here can be understood as equivalent to behaviour that is *consistent with God's will, morally correct, maximally useful, or in harmony with the universe*. The great liberal idea, or perhaps more accurately, the greatness of the liberal articulation of it, is that behavioural truth exists, and that the individual contains the means (reason) by which that truth can become manifest. Societies who have organized around this idea as their fundamental value have achieved levels of technological and social development never before seen in history. To believe that behavioural truth exists, and that it is accessible to the individual intellect, is to believe that progress is possible, and that it is individuals who are the key to unlocking it. Contrary to more traditional societies in which knowledge is more fundamentally embedded in social, political and religious hierarchies, liberalism places authority in the mind of the individual and treats them as a legitimate interpreter and source of knowledge concerning truth. The individual is seen to exist in a special relationship with reality whereby emotion and desire mediated by right reason can produce changes in the very structure of being itself. In other words, the individual transcends the group as the fundamental unit of reality. Famous liberal scholar John Dewey makes the point succinctly:

The abstraction of certain qualities of things as due to human acts and states is the power of ability in control. There can be no doubt that the long period of human arrest at a low level of culture was largely the result of failure to select the human being and his acts as a special kind of object, having his own characteristic activities that condition specifiable consequences (Dewey, 1958, p. 13)

### Liberalism and Development

Having identified the fundamental beliefs and assumptions of liberal philosophy, it is now possible to consider how they have influenced and shaped international development discourse. Two questions are important in considering the nature of this relationship.

- 1) What constitutes development according to liberalism?
- 2) How should development be pursued?

Liberalism has a rather difficult time defining exactly what development looks like. At the most general level, development according to liberalism is whatever is produced by the rational action of free individuals. A developed society then, is one that protects the ability of individuals to engage in free rational action. The coercive power of the state will only be used

to protect that capacity of the individual, for it is the capacity for rational action which is the source of human progress. Whatever conflicts arise, and whatever problems confront humanity, it is through the application of reason that they can be resolved. In order for a society to develop then, reason would need to be brought to bear on traditional knowledge structures and cultural hierarchies. As had occurred in the West, the rationalization society has profound effects on the orientation of individuals in the world. The status of the individual is elevated above that of the group and its cultural and knowledge hierarchies. Social institutions become organized around the pre-eminence of the autonomous individual, representing a sharp departure from the often theologically-based, rigid and patriarchal hierarchies of traditional society.

Modernization theory is a development theory inspired by this understanding of social change. It has its origins in the work of the German sociologist Max Weber but as mentioned in chapter one, Walt Rostow and his 5 stages of growth is perhaps the most well-known articulation of the theory. Modernization theory presented a coherent story about how free markets would allow nations to progress through various stages on their way to becoming 'modern'. Modern of course meant liberal and democratic with an emphasis on meritocratic economic organization. This mode of social organization is a natural consequence of the elevated status of the individual and his capacity for reason. As was influentially articulated by Adam Smith, economics and the free market would provide an important means by which the productive potential of the individual would become manifest. Participation in the free-market offers an opportunity for cooperation and mutual benefit. Social relationships are therefore, not zero-sum. If individuals (and states) are able to satisfy their interests through economic means, the likelihood that they will engage in political conflict is much less. Freedom to participate in the market would lead to economic growth. Economic growth would lead to further institutional, political and cultural changes which are necessary for the continuation of growth and progress. A liberal democratic capitalist state would be the end result of this process because it supports the individualist ethic required for the expression of individual rational action. Much of the modernization approach to development can be explained in this way.

Liberalism is not exhausted by its classical formulation however, and its original concepts have been expanded and reformulated over the years in ways that intersect with development theory in interesting and important ways.

In the humanities this expansion and reformulation has involved deep questions being asked about the nature of selfhood. The liberal theory of the self has been critiqued for being too unencumbered and mechanistic, failing to take into account the socially embedded nature of value and identity (Sandel, 1984; Taylor, 1989). Many of these critiques are a response to the work of John Rawls and his idea of a rational essence of the human self that can be used to theorize standards of justice behind a 'veil of ignorance' (Rawls, 2009, p. 136). These scholars question the extent to which identities and interests can be said to exist independent of a social context that imbues them with value and meaning. This debate has been a significant one in the history of liberalism and these thinkers have come to be known as communitarian philosophers (Bell, 2016). Their connection with the liberal tradition is significant but the epistemological assumptions they ascribe to more closely resemble those of the postmodern philosophers to be discussed in part two of this section. Values, identities and interests are, for these thinkers, not so easily separated from the cultural milieu in which they inhere. There has been no final resolution to the debate about liberal selfhood, but the communitarian critique of liberalism has at least provided some movement and reformulation of the liberal conception of human value and identity.

Connected to this debate about selfhood is a debate concerning the nature and scope of human freedom. If value and identity is dependent on cultural context and social hierarchy then individuals are inextricably linked with those contexts and hierarchies. On this view, value judgements are made using the tools inherited from culture. Cultures provide a hierarchy of value through which assessments of the relative importance of different well-being or quality of life outcomes are made. Reason may play a role in making these judgements, but it is not obvious that the capacity for rational choice can be meaningful outside the moral universe of a particular cultural milieu. Freedom of choice is still important, even primary, but what many communitarian thinkers would argue is that choice implies a value hierarchy that provides meaning to those choices. Freedom of choice is not enough to ensure meaningful freedom for the socially embedded individual. If the individual does not have sufficient means to achieve their valued ends, either because of material deprivation or cultural destruction, that individual cannot meaningfully be said to be free. In the context of international development this issue has attracted the attention of scholars such as Dudley Seers and Amartya Sen.



Dudley Seers work represents a significant problem for liberalism. The values he espouses can be identified as broadly liberal e.g. the necessity of having a job for individual self-respect and the enhancement of individual personality, public goods such as education, freedom of speech and political and economic sovereignty (McGillivray, 2012, p. 32-33). All of these things are valuable insofar as they contribute to the individual's ability to engage in meaningful freedom of action and expression. The aspect of Seers' thought which challenges the liberal worldview is that he suggests development is not something that can be objectively or positively defined. Seers believes the only universally acceptable aim for development is the 'realization of the potential of human personality' (Seers, 1972, p. 21). This aim has a distinctly liberal flavour to it, but in shedding any claim to objective standards concerning the methods by which it can be achieved, it becomes open to interpretation. More significantly for liberalism, it becomes open to illiberal interpretations.

This is true also for the theory of freedom in Amartya Sen's work. Once the issue of the necessary evaluation of well-being outcomes is recognized, the set of values associated with classical liberalism no longer have a strong claim to universal status. Values for liberalism were supposed to be an objective reality which could be discovered by the light of reason, independent of traditional knowledge structures and cultural hierarchies. Sen's idea that "individual freedom is quintessentially a social product" (2001, p. 31) would struggle to be reconciled with the epistemological foundations of traditional liberal thought. Different cultures could have different ideas about what constitutes well-being, and this would cause individuals to value different modes of freedoms. The UNDP's basic needs approach then can be seen as a way to maintain some claim to a universal standard in that there can be a set of universal needs common to all which must be met in order for progress or development to occur. If the goal of development is to create conditions for the realization of human potential, it is easy to agree that this cannot be achieved if people do not have things like adequate water and food access, shelter, basic literacy and numeracy, healthcare and sanitation. What is less clear is what happens when development theory ventures beyond these basic necessities.

The great liberal philosophers considered in this chapter all viewed human nature as fundamentally social. An unresolved issue that arises out of this formulation is the extent to which this sociability depends on an a priori system of value provided by more traditional hierarchies of social organization. The tension caused by this issue can be seen as one reason

why development thought has returned to a focus on the state as noted at the end of chapter two. In liberal philosophy the state has always been understood as the means by which freedom is preserved and protected. As the understanding of freedom has expanded, so too has the state's mandate. The exact scope and nature of state involvement in mediating the affairs of individuals is therefore a crucial issue in development discourse. Freedom in the classical liberal sense is tightly linked with the absence of coercion and state intervention in the affairs of individuals. As liberalism has drifted away from its classical roots however, scholars have become more willing to engage with ideas about an expanded role for the state and central planning. Progressive philosopher John Dewey is perhaps one of the better examples.

Dewey criticized liberalism of the classical era for being unprepared and ill-equipped to organize the "new forces" of modern society and to "counteract social disintegration" (Dewey, 1963, p. 627). What was needed instead was a liberalism that would "gather itself together to formulate the ends to which it is devoted in terms of means that are relevant to the contemporary situation" (p. 627). He goes on to add that

The only form of enduring social organization that is now possible is one in which the new forces of productivity are cooperatively controlled and used in the interest of the effective liberty and the cultural development of the individuals that constitute society. Such a social order cannot be established by an unplanned and external convergence of the actions of separate individuals, each of whom is bent on personal private advantage. This idea is the Achilles heel of early liberalism (p. 627).

For Dewey, social planning is necessary in order to achieve meaningful freedom for the individual and avoid cultural and moral disintegration. Dewey himself maintains that the liberal values "of freed intelligence, of liberty, of opportunity for every individual to realize the potentialities of which he is possessed" are values worth aiming at. However, he rejects the idea that the means by which they should be pursued must conform to classical liberal prescriptions. Individual self-interest for, Dewey and other more left-leaning liberals, had proved not to be a reliable mechanism by which rational, ordered and equal social relations could be manifested. For Dewey, the democratic state as a legitimate representative of the citizens of a society must intervene in social affairs in order to solve social problems. Dewey holds steadfast to the power of rationality and the scientific method as the means by which social problems can be solved, but he does away with the idea that in solving these social

problems societies discover universal and objective truths.<sup>10</sup> Dewey was influenced by philosophers such as G.W. F Hegel (Dewey, 1963, p. 619) and for this reason he approaches liberal values from a markedly different epistemological grounding.

While Dewey represents a more left-leaning liberal mode of political thought, other theorists whose philosophical lineage can be traced back to Hegel span the entire political spectrum (Tucker, 2017, p. 124). Understanding this distinct philosophical lineage is the subject of Part Two of this chapter.

## Part Two:

### Beyond Liberalism

As should be clear at this point, liberal values have been a fixture in development thinking since WW2. Since the birth of liberal thought however, it has always had its detractors and critics. Over time the epistemological ground upon which liberalism rests has changed, strengthening its claims in some ways and weakening it in others. In Grotius, Locke and Smith we are able to see remnants of a supernatural guarantor of the natural laws which govern humanity's moral and destiny. By the time we get to Mill, liberal epistemology did not require this guarantor, instead the techniques and tools of science would be enough to discover the natural laws of the universe. Through reason humanity would be able to gradually harmonise its behaviour and live in accordance with the dictates of the universe's natural laws. But is reason really a competent means to acquire objective knowledge about the world? And further, can reason decipher universal moral truths to guide behaviour? And if not, what does that mean for the liberal vision of development? These are the types of questions which have been considered by the schools of thought critical of the liberal project.

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<sup>10</sup> Dewey's book *Experience and Nature* (1958) is a thorough articulation of the relationship between the scientific method and his *pragmatic* as opposed to *objective* conception of truth. *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (2004) is a reconciliation of his philosophical commitments with liberal values.

The goal of part two of this chapter is to consider the above questions, paying particular attention to the role that power relations play in shaping the institution of international development. The philosophies considered can broadly be encapsulated by the label *Counter-enlightenment* philosophy. As was the case in my discussion of liberalism, my focus will be on drawing out the fundamental assumptions and themes which characterize the worldview of this distinct intellectual strain. To criticize reason and the status of the individual as the transcendental moral unit appears almost blasphemous in a modern Western context, and it can be easy to categorize the people who do engage in such critiques as irrational and religious conservatives. To question the efficacy of rationality, secular understandings of the cosmos, as well as the preeminent position of the individual in relation to the collective seems to strike the modern Western mind as a normatively questionable exercise. But as should be clear from Chapter One, liberalism in terms of its acceptance as a legitimate philosophy of development has not been an overwhelming success. Important questions concerning the nature of knowledge, the universality of value, and the mediating influence of power have derailed the liberal development project. There are powerful arguments to be made against the liberal worldview, and the philosophers of the continental tradition constitute the philosophical ground upon which those arguments rest. It would be far too simple to conclude that one side is 'right'. As will become clear by the end of this thesis, the ongoing debate between these two distinct intellectual strains continues to this day, and we can see evidence of this fact in the discourse of international development.

#### The Counter-Enlightenment:

It was suggested earlier that if international development thought has shifted into a 'post-development era' it would be wise to understand what is being left behind. Having gone some way in the direction of fulfilling that task another important task can be begun; understanding what lies beyond 'development' understood within a liberal framework.

#### Postmodernism:

Liberal, or *Modern*, epistemology is characterized by its reliance upon, and confidence in reason as a competent method by which humans can form knowledge about the self-contained natural world. As should be clear by now, this includes knowledge concerning the content of normative categories and values. The reason it is often called *modern* is so that it

can be differentiated from traditional epistemologies in which knowledge is more fundamentally embedded in social, political and religious hierarchies. To transcend and reject the modern epistemological project is not necessarily to return to more traditional epistemic foundations however. To do so would be to disregard the reality and experience of the modern era and all the dramatic global changes of which it has given rise. Philosophies and movements which reject modern epistemology then seek to usher in a new intellectual age, a *post-modern* era. Postmodernism in the context of this thesis then is defined by its relation and opposition to *Modernism*. These different intellectual ages do not occur in neat packages, nor do they necessarily follow each other in chronological order. This contestation between the modernist and postmodernist epistemologies have a long history and continue to this day. *Modernism* and *Postmodernism* should be seen as labels for different epistemological positions rather than labels relating to distinct epochs in history.

The philosophers considered all have distinct and comprehensive philosophies, but their underlying assumptions and common philosophical starting points allow for their grouping into a distinct intellectual strain.

#### Rousseau and the Collective Will:

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) can be considered the most significant figure in the political *counter-enlightenment*. In the dramatic changes that were occurring as a result of the enlightenment-inspired rationalization of social institutions, Rousseau saw not ‘progress’, but rather the moral degradation of mankind. For Rousseau, civilization was achieved at the expense of morality, and reason was the culprit.

It is reason that engenders self-love, and reflection that strengthens it; it is reason that makes man shrink into himself; it is reason that makes him keep aloof from everything that can trouble or afflict him: it is philosophy that destroys his connections with other men (Rousseau, 2008, p. 16).

The use of the term ‘self-love’ above comes from Rousseau’s concept of *amour propre* which denotes a form of self-love derived from the favourable opinions of others. This form of self-love is contrasted with *amour de-soi* which is a form of self-love that pre-dates social organization and is derived from the natural drive of all creatures towards self-preservation. For Rousseau, *amour de-soi* is a necessary and natural instinct, and is the origin of all passions including *amour propre* (Bertram, 2018). *Amour propre* arises in individuals when

humans start to organise themselves in small settled communities. In these communities, new pressures to compete for sexual partners force individuals to consider their own value in relation to others. To be recognized as having more value than another means to be more successful at attracting sexual partners. The problem however, is that this drive to be recognized can often cause conflict when others fail to recognize an individual's value or esteem. An individual's value is not recognized in and of itself, it is recognized only in relation to other individuals. It is not enough therefore to be merely valuable. Individuals must demonstrate their value as being over and above that of other members of their society. This means that the quest for recognition is inherently competitive and conflictual, pitting individuals against each other, with the end result being the creation of both winners and losers of the social game. It is the competitive and relational nature of *amour propre* which leads to the emergence of inequality. For Rousseau, *amour propre* and the inequality to which it gives rise are a natural result of modern civilization's reliance on reason (Rousseau, 2008, p. 15-16).

This situation reaches its most problematic manifestation when humans organize themselves in larger and more materially wealthy social units such as cities and states. Once reason has unleashed *amour propre* on the world they form an unholy union, giving rise to the innovations in agriculture and technological capabilities which characterize modern civilization, and producing in turn more complex and unhealthy routes to the achievement of *amour propre*. The effect of this marriage between reason and *amour propre* is the descent of civilization into conflict with itself. The inequality that arises out of this situation is termed by Rousseau 'moral' or 'political' inequality, for it "depends on a kind of convention, and is established, or at least authorized, by the common consent of mankind" (Rousseau, 2008, p. 2).

As in the above passage of Rousseau's, reason is also the method by which the winners are able to rationalise a lack of compassion for those who suffer at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Reason does not lend itself to compassion in man, in fact "it is in consequence of her dictates that he mutters to himself at the sight of another in distress, You may perish for aught I care, nothing can hurt me. Nothing less than those evils, which threaten the whole species, can disturb the calm sleep of the philosopher, and force him from his bed" (Rousseau, 2008, p. 16). Beyond this too, civilization's winners now have a vested interest in maintaining their privileged position. They praise the achievements of civilization such as art,

technology, science and aesthetic culture. These are all held up as signs of progress and of man's general improvement. Rousseau however, argues that this belief in 'progress' is merely a pretence to hide the underlying harm caused by civilization to individuals at the bottom of the hierarchy and are merely "garlands of flowers over the chains which weigh them down" (Rousseau, 2009, p. 3).

Modern civilization for Rousseau was a corrupt enterprise, and reason its author. If man was to achieve true freedom and progress, society would need to be based on something other than mere reason.

### Freedom and the General Will

For Rousseau, the best mode of existence humans are capable of is that state which occurs "between the indolence of the primitive state, and the petulant activity of self-love" (Rousseau, 2008, p. 25). Unfortunately, reason had carried the species far beyond this ideal state and it was not possible to reclaim the innocence and freedom associated with that earlier stage in the development of the human faculties (p. 25). Having been led astray by reason, humans had sought in the establishment of a state, refuge from the situation of endemic conflict caused by the pursuit of *amour propre* and its resultant inequality (see Rousseau, 2008, p. 36-39). What this amounted to was the reinforcement of unequal and exploitative social relations by state power. The state would be controlled by the rich and powerful and would continue and even strengthen the oppression faced by the poor and weak. Nowhere in this situation could true human freedom be realized. Even the rich could not be said to have meaningful freedom as the acts they engage in in pursuit of *amour propre* had pathologized their ability to orient themselves morally and spiritually.

This state of affairs, as described in the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, was the situation which humanity now found itself. In one of his later works *The Social Contract* he sought to theorize a way out of this sorry state. In this work he identified his task as being:

To find a form of association that may defend and protect with the whole force of the community the person and property of every associate, and by means of which each, joining together with all, may nevertheless obey only himself, and remain as free as before (Rousseau, 2002; 2008, p. 163).

The central tension that Rousseau sought to overcome was that between the freedom of the individual and the power of the state. As has already been discussed, reason was not a

competent tool to perform this function and so a different foundation for social organization was needed. For Rousseau, it is man's deepest passions that should form the foundation of his moral and political life.

Let moralists say what they will, the human understanding is greatly indebted to the passions, which, on their side, are likewise universally allowed to be greatly indebted to the human understanding (Rousseau, 2008, p. 8).

It is the passions that drive humanity to understand the world, and it is the purpose of understanding to serve the passions. On this conception, reason is at all times surrounded on both sides by humanity's more fundamental drives. Privileging reason as over and above the passion's leads to the abandoning of a belief in God, disobedience, and to perverse pursuits of *amour propre*. This is unacceptable for Rousseau as on his view, belief in God is an essential component of ordered social relations and the possibility of true freedom. Rousseau was a deeply religious man and he was of the belief that God had imbued all things, humans included, with a natural order.

Whether matter is eternal or created, whether its origin is passive or not, it is still certain that the whole is one, and that it proclaims a single intelligence; for I see nothing that is not part of the same ordered system, nothing which does not co-operate to the same end, namely, the conservation of all within the established order. This being who wills and can perform his will, this being active through his own power, this being, whoever he may be, who moves the universe and orders all things, is what I call God (Rousseau, 2011, Book IV)

To understand that in man's natural passions he possessed the ability to relate to his fellow man in the way in which God intended, and to see instead that man had followed reason into a state of conflict and sin was deeply troubling to Rousseau. To escape this situation then, the new society would need to be founded upon the natural passions, first and foremost of which was a belief in the divine order established by God. This belief is important because the common people need to believe that their leaders are acting out God's will in order to tolerate the "continual deprivations which good laws impose" (Rousseau, 2002 p. 182).

Here, an important and deeply contentious part of Rousseau's philosophy is opened up. The social order which would prevail in Rousseau's new state is not one in which the individual interests of each citizen would be given precedence. Instead, the social order would be based



on the interests of the collective, what Rousseau called the “general will”. For Rousseau, when this new society is formed “each of us puts in common his person and all his power under the supreme direction of the general will; and in return each member becomes an indivisible part of the whole” (Rousseau, 2002, p. 164). This form of association produces a new moral and collective body that acts on the basis of the general will, and in the interest of the collective as a whole. True freedom then, is to be found by virtue of having a place within the collectivised social organism. It is in this concept of the general will that Rousseau finds a resolution to the tension between the freedom of the individual and the power of the state.

In short, each giving himself to all, gives himself to no one; and since there is no associate over whom we do not acquire the same rights which we concede to him over ourselves, we gain the equivalent of all that we lose, and more power to preserve what we have (Rousseau, 2002 p. 164).

This “power to preserve what we have” comes from the collective power of the whole, i.e. the state enforcement mechanism. Rousseau acknowledges that “the private will acts incessantly against the general will” (2002, p. 214) and so it will be necessary for the state to combat these deviations from the general will by using force.

If the State or polity is but a moral person, the life of which consists in the union of its members, and if the most important of its functions is that of self-preservation, it needs a universal and coercive force to move and organize every part in the manner most appropriate for the whole (Rousseau, 2002, p. 173).

If the state has to employ its ‘universal and coercive force’ to counteract the recalcitrant will of some individuals, this, for Rousseau, means “nothing else than that he shall be forced to be free” (p. 166). So absolute was the power of the general will over the individual that if it was expedient for the state that someone should die, then they should die (Rousseau, 2002, p. 177). No longer was life to be seen as only a natural phenomenon, it would now also be “a conditional gift of the State” (Rousseau, 2002, p. 177).

Rousseau represents a significant departure from the themes of enlightenment philosophy. For Rousseau reason is not a competent guide to right conduct and we should instead rely on our natural passions. Foremost of the natural passions is a devotion to God and the manifestation of his divine order via the state and its legislators. In Rousseau’s philosophy it is the collective, and not the individual, which is the morally important unit. Rousseau’s work

would be inspirational to a number of philosophers who came after him, and his ideas are still influential even in the contemporary period. One of the philosophers most influenced by Rousseau was Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

### Hegel and the State's Divine Mission

Similar to Rousseau, a significant motivation behind Hegel's philosophy was the preservation of religious faith in the context of the increasingly secular influence of enlightenment reason. Hegel produced a staggering amount of work, reconfiguring the study of philosophy in the process. Relevant for the subject matter of this thesis is his unique account of reason which departed dramatically from the enlightenment version, and had a significant effect on the study and understanding of metaphysical reality as a whole.

### Hegel in a Post-Kantian World

In order to understand Hegel's philosophical project, it will be helpful to understand briefly the work of Immanuel Kant. Kant was a supremely significant and prolific thinker in his own right, and so to mention his name and provide only a brief account and interpretation of his philosophical project is somewhat problematic. However, in the context of this thesis and its discussion of Hegelian philosophy it is important only to understand Kant's significance in the history of philosophical thought as well as how it connects with Hegel's project.

Kant is known for his synthesis of the rationalist and empiricist philosophies of the early modern period (Rohlf, 2018, Introduction). In regard to knowledge of the external (or objective) world, both of these approaches present markedly different accounts. On the rationalist account, at least some truths about the external world must be known *a priori*, meaning that some knowledge is innate (Markie, 2017, Sec. 1.2). Empiricists on the other hand argue that any knowledge about the external worlds must come from experience.

Reason can be used to order our ideas about the external world, but the ideas themselves are dependent on sense experience (Markie, 2017, Sec 1.2.). Kant saw that when the rationalists and empiricists made claims about the objective world, neither of their accounts would hold up in light of criticism by the other.

The basic enlightenment account of knowledge production broadly conforms to this realist formulation:

- We encounter reality directly via our senses.
- The empirical data collected by our senses is then organized into concepts and categories by our capacity to reason.
- Knowledge of reality is formed through this process.

Reason's competence as a means to knowledge of the objective world hinges on the first proposition above. While intuitively persuasive, this proposition had become weakened by a growing recognition that sense organs condition human experience of reality. If this is the case, then the empiricist claim that sense-perception is able to provide direct access to reality *as such* is severely weakened. Doubt crept in as to whether the information collected by the senses could really be said to be representative of mind-independent reality. The rationalist account suffered in the reverse direction. They had long argued that universal concepts could not be derived from sense-experience. For rationalists, knowledge of universals is the result of innate knowledge and of rational deductions made based on that innate knowledge (Markie, 2017, Se. 2). The problem that rationalists faced was that if the content of their universal concepts could not be traced back to reality as their source, then there is no reason to assume that those concepts have any necessary connection and application to the world of sensory experience (Hicks, 2004, p. 31). Kant's philosophical project was an attempt to transcend this problem.

Kant posited a mediating cognitive structure that exists in between external reality and the representations of that reality which are formed in the human mind, and of which we have knowledge. For Kant, the world that we interact with via our capacity for sense experience is not completely independent of the human mind (Rohlf, 2018, Sec. 2.2). In this way it is possible to have a priori knowledge concerning the external world. As Kant himself explains;

It has hitherto been assumed that our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to ascertain anything about these objects a priori, by means of conceptions, and thus to extend the range of our knowledge, have been rendered abortive by this assumption. Let us make the experiment whether we may not be more successful in metaphysics, if we assume that the objects must conform to our cognition (Kant, 2009, p. 23-24).

Kant's idea was that this mediating structure, that is, the cognitive structure which gives rise to conscious experience, has an identity of its own and is therefore causally implicated in

shaping subjective awareness. The “sensible world” then, is a construction of the human mind made out of both sensory experience *and* a priori cognitive forms (Rohlf, 2018, Sec. 2.2). The profound implication of this argument is that the purpose of cognition is not to provide awareness of objective reality, rather its fundamental purpose is to create reality in subjective experience. Included in this formulation of a subjectively created phenomenal world are necessary and universal features of experience. On Kant’s account, it was empiricism and rationalism’s realist presuppositions that had rendered their theories unable to ground universal and necessary truths. The subject’s identity as creator of experience means that necessary and universal features of experience will be established as a result of the mind’s own constructive powers.

Kant’s philosophy retains for the world of human experience universal and necessary features which can provide content to, and objects for, scientific exploration and discovery. This is because the laws of science “reflect the human mind’s contribution to structuring our experience” (Rohlf, 2018, 2.2). What is sacrificed in Kant’s formulation of knowledge is knowledge of things as they exist *in themselves*:

We have intended, then, to say that all our intuition is nothing but the representation of phenomena; that the things which we intuite, are not in themselves the same as our representations of them in intuition, nor are their relations in themselves so constituted as they appear to us; and that if we take away the subject, or even only the subjective constitution of our senses in general, then not only the nature and relations of objects in space and time, but even space and time themselves disappear; and that these, as phenomena, cannot exist in themselves, but only in us. What may be the nature of objects considered as things in themselves and without reference to the receptivity of our sensibility is quite unknown to us (Kant, 2009, p. 100).

A consequence of this argument is that having limited reason’s domain to the phenomenal and subjective world of human experience, it cannot critique the metaphysical assumptions of Christianity. Reason is not qualified to make judgements about such things, and so it cannot make competent arguments against faith in God, or against the freedom of the individual soul (Rohlf, 2018, Sec. 2.2). For Kant, human beings only experience appearances, and not things in themselves. Reality is fundamentally a subjective construction, providing the subject only what it needs to know in order to function in the world, leaving things in themselves beyond the scope of human knowledge.

Kant's assertion that reality is fundamentally a subjective creation had a significant influence on Hegel's philosophy. As will become clear however, Hegel would extend this idea much further than Kant, and make far bolder metaphysical claims.

### Hegelian Metaphysics:

By the time of his death, Kant's philosophy had had an overwhelming influence on the German intellectual scene. Hegel's philosophy can be viewed as one very significant strain of post-Kantian philosophy. From Kant Hegel had learned that by limiting reason's domain to the realm of subjective experience, faith in the ultimate reality of God could be preserved. In Kant's formulation however, knowledge of that ultimate reality eluded the subject. Reason could not cross that border. Hegel agreed with Kant that reality was subjectively created but believed Kant had not gone far enough in this assertion. Kant had made merely an epistemological case which confined reason to the realm of phenomenal subjective experience. He had left the realm of what he referred to as *noumenal* reality out of reach for human knowledge entirely. Hegel's response to this was not to try and resolve the epistemological problems associated with sense-perception and concept formation. But rather to solve the problem metaphysically.

Hegel posited that the subject's creation of reality actually goes far deeper than Kant had imagined. Reality, for Kant, is a subjective creation because insofar as humans have conscious awareness of reality, it is created and shaped by Kant's postulated intermediary cognitive structure. Kant leaves open the possibility that human beings are responsive to a noumenal reality that exists independently of our perceptions of it. Hegel does away with this idea of a noumenal reality completely. For Hegel, reality is subject all the way down. But not subject in the sense of the individual human subject. Subject in the sense of God, or Absolute Spirit (Redding, 2018, sec 2.2). For Hegel, reality is entirely a creation of the subject, that is, of God. The unfolding of history then, is the unfolding of God's divine will. As Redding (2018) puts it, "the mind of God becomes actual only via its particularization in the minds of "his" finite material creatures" (sec. 2.2).

The advantage of the Hegelian account of metaphysical reality is that the conscious 'self' is able to have a direct connection with the consciousness of God himself.<sup>11</sup> Hegel had

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<sup>11</sup> This could also usefully be given a more secular phrasing e.g. "a direct connection with the conscious substrate of the universe".

criticized the realist and objectivist models of the enlightenment philosophers for their mechanical and reductionist accounts of the self (Hicks, 2004, p. 46). An identification of the consciousness of the human subject with the consciousness of the divine spirit working itself out in history preserved a deep purpose for individual life. The universal and necessary features of reality were no longer just the subjective creations of reason as they were for Kant. The universal and necessary features were the subjective creation of a divine consciousness which was constitutive of reality itself. Best of all, because human consciousness partakes in that very same consciousness, we have, through our reason, access to those universal and necessary features. In Hegel's philosophy however, reason becomes transformed. As Hicks (2004) notes, "Hegel's reason is fundamentally a creative function, not a cognitive one. It does not come to know a pre-existing reality; it brings all of reality into existence" (p. 46).

#### Hegel's transformation of Reason:

Hegel's reason being fundamentally a creative function, and more precisely, the creative function of a totalizing and absolute Subject which is constitutive of reality, means that reason is not beholden to the traditional rules of logic employed by philosophers like Plato or Aristotle (Maybee, 2016, Introduction). In traditional Platonic or Aristotelian reasoning, if the premises of an argument lead to a contradiction, then it must be concluded that the premises are false. We are then back to square one, awaiting new premises which might be able to lead to a valid (i.e. non-contradictory) conclusion. For Hegel, only the whole is true. That is, every moment in history is necessarily incomplete and therefore partially untrue and almost certainly contradictory. History unfolds in the direction of the absolute, and so an adherence to a law of non-contradiction is nothing but an arbitrary and unnatural block to history's march toward the cumulative whole which is the only complete truth. Indeed, for Hegel, it is through the clash of contradictions that progress is made (Maybee, 2016, Sec. 1). The overcoming and subsumption of contradictions into the progressive march towards the absolute is how we evolve. On this view, reason is not a mechanistic, but rather an organic process.

Contradiction being built into the structure of reason and progress is significant because it makes reason compatible with Judeo-Christian cosmology. Universes arising out of nothing, benevolent Gods creating worlds in which evil exists, virgin births and all the other contradictory features of the Christian tradition which are not compatible with the law of non-

contradiction in traditional philosophy, all make sense within the context of Hegel's thought. This mode of reason is also differentiated from its enlightenment counterpart by allowing for a strong relativism. If contradiction is a constituent element of reality and the only substantive truth is found in the Subjective whole, then what is true in a mere historical sense is only true for as long as it takes a particular contradiction to be overcome and subsumed into the whole. What is true in one moment of history may not be true in the next.

A further effect of Hegel's metaphysics is that reason becomes a function of the collective and not the individual. If reality consists entirely of the Divine Spirit working itself out in the course of history, then individual human subjects are the mere material vessels through which God's plan becomes manifest. Individuals are not independent initiators of their own volitional acts. The individual is just one small component of the divine whole. Reality is created at the level of the Absolute, far outside the purview of the individual subject. As Hegel describes it:

For the fancies which the individual in his isolation indulges, cannot be the model for universal reality; just as universal law is not designed for the units of the mass. These as such may, in fact, find their interests decidedly thrust into the background (Hegel, 1956, p. 35)

Hegel's collectivism is reminiscent of Rousseau who was one of his major influences. True freedom, for Hegel, could only be achieved through the complete submission of the individual to the collective will embodied in the state. Hegel's reverence for Christian values and traditional social hierarchies too played a role in his collectivism. Individuals are but component parts of their cultures and, therefore, of their state which is the ultimate representation of the social hierarchy. Each individual then, is to find a place in their cultural hierarchy so as to engage in the organic process of bringing about the Absolute. The state, for Hegel, is of supreme importance because it is the pinnacle of the social hierarchy, and is, therefore, "the Divine Idea as it exists on Earth" (Hegel, 1956, p. 39). So deep was Hegel's reverence for the state and its divine purpose that he goes as far as to say that "all the worth which the human being possesses – all spiritual reality, he possesses only through the State" (1956, p. 39). On this view, individual freedom is achieved by complete submission to the will of the state, as it is through the state that the individual acquires their proper place in history. In this regard there is a striking similarity between Hegel's view and that of

Rousseau's. For both scholars, the proper relationship between the individual and the state consists in the state's pre-eminence, and the individual's willing acceptance of this fact.

### Lessons from Rousseau and Hegel:

The pre-eminence of the collective in both Rousseau and Hegel's thinking seems to be a natural consequence of their rejection of enlightenment principles of social organization. Enlightenment reason, which is a capacity of the individual, leads to an unnecessary and unhelpful focus on the individual and his desires and interests in relation to others. An excess of reason and individualism leads to the questioning of traditional religious and social hierarchies, causing social relations to take on a mechanistic, impersonal and unnatural character. The application of reason leads to dramatic technological advances and social changes, but it also leads to a perverse form of social stratification, a lack of faith, social decay and the suppression of innate human freedoms. Enlightenment reason is therefore seen as a corruptive and fundamentally incompetent tool for orienting human beings in the world. What is required instead is the complete submission of the individual to the collective in order that God's divine plan may become manifest. For Rousseau this meant the enforcement of the general will of all by the state, and for Hegel it meant the devotion of the individual to the state's divine mission.

### From the Harmony of Interests to the Primacy of Power

Armed now with the epistemological and metaphysical insights of some of the early counter-enlightenment philosophers it is possible to consider the implications of these positions for the human ability to solve complex social problems like international development. The Liberal position was to institutionalize a space in which the individual could freely make use of their capacity to reason in pursuit of their own self-defined interests. Liberals rely on the fact that in this context individuals are naturally able to find ways to cooperate and organize their affairs rationally, producing in turn, a 'harmony of interests'. The only legitimate functions of the state in this formulation was the maintenance of a monopoly on coercive force, and the adjudication of disputes. This idea of a harmony of interests can also be applied to international relations. As was discussed in the section 'Liberalism and International Relations', even when there is no world government to adjudicate disputes between states themselves, states with similar preferences (particularly liberal preferences) are able to work together in pursuit of common ends. As has been learned from Rousseau, Kant and Hegel however, this view countenances a perverse form of freedom which leads to an undue focus



on the identity and interests of the individual and relies on a tool (enlightenment reason) that is unable to 'know' reality in a meaningful way. The proper focus, these scholars argue, should be the identity of the group, which is the embodiment of truth itself, as well as being the source of the proper mode of freedom. The state defines what interests and ends should be pursued, and individuals are expected to fall in line and perform whatever role is required of them so that those interests and ends may become manifest. For these scholars it is not meaningful to speak of a 'harmony of interests'.

Just as individual subjects are mere vessels for the primordial and predetermined forces which govern human behaviour, so too is language. The content of language is dependent on what the nature of those forces are. An extremely influential answer to this question comes from Friedrich Nietzsche and his elaboration of the idea of a 'will to power'.

And do ye know what "the universe" is to my mind? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This universe is a monster of energy, without beginning or end; a fixed and brazen quantity of energy which grows neither bigger nor smaller, which does not consume itself, but only alters its face; as a whole its bulk is immutable.....

would you have a name for my world? A solution of all your riddles? Do ye also want a light, ye most concealed, strongest and most undaunted men of the blackest midnight?—This world is the Will to Power—and nothing else! And even ye yourselves are this will to power—and nothing besides! (Nietzsche, 2016, p. 432)

Nietzsche agreed with Hegel, Kant and Rousseau before him that reason was an incompetent tool for engaging with reality. He disagreed however, with the progressive strain (particularly in relation to Hegel's work) that ran through much of this philosophy. Reality, for Nietzsche, was not inherently progressive or teleological in any way. Instead, he saw the world as the immutable, self-creating and self-destroying battlefield of the will to power (2016, p. 432). What was needed then was a deep identification with and embracing of the instinctual will to power that pervaded everything. Nietzsche's account of the pervasiveness of power has been influential on a number of more contemporary postmodern scholars including Michel Foucault. Foucault agreed with Nietzsche's account of the ubiquity of power, suggesting that power is omnipresent "not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another" (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). It is important to understand that

Foucault's academic project has its roots in the alternative epistemologies developed by the counter-enlightenment philosophers. Human reason cannot 'know' the objective world, and truth, therefore, cannot exist independently of the particular identities and interests of groups. If the Nietzschean ubiquity of power is added, we get a fundamentally different picture of the nature of knowledge. And this is exactly the route down which Foucault travels.

For Foucault, power produces knowledge, that is, knowledge is the instantiation of certain relations of power. To speak from a position of knowledge is at the same time to claim authority over a given issue and the people which that issue affects (Hansen, 2011, p. 171).

We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (Foucault, 1978b, p. 27)

A concept central to Foucault's work is *Discourse*. Discourse, for Foucault, describes a socially constructed linguistic landscape that provides meaning to the concepts and objects which constitute knowledge (Hansen, 2011, p. 170). It is in the social construction of discourse that power comes to constitute knowledge. Again, this should be seen as a natural consequence of the group-centric and anti-rational epistemology of the counter-enlightenment tradition. Each group has their own socially constructed set of discourses which constitute the system of sense-making they use to order their affairs and orient themselves in the world.

Foucault's concept of *Genealogy* arises out of this understanding of the relationship between power and knowledge. Genealogy was Foucault's attempt to formulate a 'history of the present' (Hansen, 2011, p. 171). What Foucault saw when he looked at history was not groups of conscious individuals working to gradually understand and elucidate objective truth, but rather groups of individuals attempting to privilege their own socially constructed truths over the truths of others. Thus, in order to understand the present, we must understand which discourses were privileged, and which were marginalized in the social construction of history. From this standpoint we are then able to criticize the existing order and its historical epistemic imperialism.

Nietzsche's description of the world as the energy of the immutable will-to-power and its influence on Foucault's discourse theory is a large part of the story of the post-development

school. It is not the whole story however. As was mentioned in the section ‘Populism and Civil Society’, there is another approach that has been almost equally influential and has also proved to be less vulnerable to critique than Foucault and his followers. This approach is represented by the work of Ernesto Laclau. Laclau’s ideas were covered in Chapter One and so the discussion here will introduce two more links in the postmodern chain which show how the continental philosophy so far described connects with Laclau and his influence on post-development thought. These two links are Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004).

### The Destruktion of Metaphysics:

Martin Heidegger is another important philosopher that has his roots in the post-Kantian continental tradition. He had learnt from Kant that reason is unable to extend beyond the realm of subjective experience and come to *know* external reality as it exists as such. What humans do have access to is the phenomena of human experience (Rohlf, 2018, Sec. 2.2). Heidegger begins his philosophical project from this standpoint. His philosophy seeks to determine what it means to ‘*be*’ in the world.

In his most famous work *Being and Time* Martin Heidegger poses this question of the meaning of Being. Wheeler (2018) suggests that this question can usefully be formulated as “what does ‘to exist’ *mean*” (Sec. 2.2.1, italics in the original). Heidegger suggests that the question of being aims at;

ascertaining the a priori conditions not only for the possibility of the sciences which examine entities as entities of such and such a type, and, in so doing, already operate with an understanding of Being, but also for the possibility of those ontologies themselves which are prior to the ontical sciences and which provide their foundations (Heidegger, 1973, p. 31)

*Being and Time* was never fully completed however, and the failure of Heidegger’s attempt to answer the question of being as he had conceptualised it in *Being and Time* led him to reformulate it in his later writings. In this reformulation Heidegger turns his attention to the “openness” or truth of Being (Korab-Karpowicz, 2007, p. 301). Central to this reformulation is Heidegger’s distinction between ontological and ontic being. In the *Basic Problems of*

*Phenomenology* he calls this distinction the “ontological difference” (Heidegger, 1982, p. 72).

The ontological difference amounts to the ability to distinguish between the “*uncoveredness of a being and the disclosedness of its being*” (Heidegger, 1982, p. 72. Italics in original). For Heidegger, “A being can be uncovered, whether by way of perception or some other mode of access, only if the being of this being is already disclosed – only if I already understand it” (1982, p. 72). He suggests that it is only by distinguishing between uncoveredness and disclosedness and understanding that a being’s uncoveredness depends for its possibility on the disclosedness of being that we can begin to “embark on some procedure to establish the actuality of the being” (p. 72). What this amounts to is a distinction between *beings* and *Being* as such. Between beings with particular ontic properties (e.g. facts about the particular entity in question) and the Being which makes those entities intelligible as beings.

In posing his question about the truth of Being and making the distinction between beings and Being as such, Heidegger was attempting to transcend Kant’s subjectivism and reach something real in the noumenal sense:

In pursuing the Kantian problem we arrive at the question of the *ontological difference*. Only on the path of the solution of this basic ontological question can we succeed in not only positively corroborating the Kantian thesis that being is not a real predicate but at the same time positively supplementing it by a radical interpretation of being in general as extantness (actuality, existence) (Heidegger, 1982, p. 72).

Whereas Kant’s account of subjective phenomenal experience assumed an underlying subject, Heidegger took the phenomenological nature of reality even further by not assuming the existence of the experiencing subject. Indeed, it is what it means ‘to exist’ in the first place that he was trying to understand. Approaching philosophy in this way, Heidegger presents a powerful critique against the Western philosophical tradition.

According to Heidegger, without an answer to the question of Being “*basically all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim*” (1973, p. 31). In other words, without an understanding of Being, all philosophical claims rest on an assumption which they themselves cannot account for or justify. Heidegger argued that Western philosophy and its tradition of metaphysics had obscured the meaning of true Being and reduced it to a mere

being (Korab-Karpowicz, 2007, p. 301-302). What Heidegger sought to do then was overcome the metaphysical constructions of the Western tradition and return to the understanding of Being that existed before philosophy veered off course.

It is here that Heidegger's concept of *Destruktion* becomes relevant. Heidegger suggests in *Being and Time* that;

If the question of Being is to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved. We understand this task as one in which by taking the question of Being as our clue, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being - the ways which have guided us ever since (1973, p. 44).

This project of destruction was necessary because humanity had a profound desire for answers to its metaphysical questions concerning Being. Heidegger recognized that humanity required answers to these questions, but Western philosophy and its various projects of metaphysics had drawn it further and further away from true Being. As Korab-Karpowicz notes, "Every age, every human epoch, no matter however different they may be - Greece after the Presocratics, Rome, the Middle Ages, modernity - has asserted a metaphysics and, therefore, is placed in a specific relationship to what-is as a whole" (2007, p. 305). A central theme in Heidegger's later work then became working backwards through the various metaphysical claims of past traditions in order to arrive back at those "primordial experiences" in which it might become possible to determine the nature of Being as such (Heidegger, 1973, p. 44). An important implication of Heidegger's philosophy is that the content of language and texts is always dependent on the metaphysical assumptions dominant at a particular moment in history. And as Heidegger had shown, these metaphysical assumptions were not a reliable guide to the truth of Being as such. The language of metaphysics, therefore, represents a barrier to a true understanding of Being.

Heidegger's project of destruction was influential to Jacques Derrida, who, as mentioned earlier, was influential on the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

### Deconstruction and the Transcendental Signifier:

Jacques Derrida was a prolific writer who developed many complex arguments and concepts in the course of his philosophical career. It would be wrong to suggest that his philosophy arises directly out of Heidegger. He was influenced by many other philosophers, none more important than Friedrich Nietzsche (Hoy, 1979, p. 224). In this thesis, however, Derrida is approached through Heidegger.

Derrida is an important heir to Heidegger's philosophical project (Backman, 2012, p. 67). He praises Heidegger for being the one writer most aware of the failure and falsity of Western metaphysics (Strawser, 2013, p. 18). However, despite Derrida's clear reverence for Heidegger, he questioned whether Heidegger ultimately remains consistent in his rejection of metaphysics:

Perhaps it is already apparent that, while we appeal to Heideggerian motifs in decisive places, we would especially like to raise the question whether, with respect to the relations between logos and phone, and with respect to the pretended irreducibility of certain word unities (the unity of the word being or of other "radical words"), Heidegger's thought does not sometimes raise the same questions as the metaphysics of presence (Derrida, 1973, p. 74).

The metaphysics of presence for Derrida is the "exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible" desire for a "transcendental signifier" (Derrida, 1976, p. 49). This transcendental signifier is "an ultimate central 'meaning' that would no longer refer to anything other than itself and would thus provide a self-sufficient and permanently accessible center for discursive chains of reference" (Backman, 2012, p. 70). In his first major work *Of Grammatology* Derrida criticizes Heidegger because, as he writes:

Heideggerian thought would reinstate rather than destroy the instance of the logos and of the truth of being as "primum signatum:" the "transcendental" signified.....implied by all categories or all determined significations, by all lexicons and all syntax, and therefore by all linguistic signifiers (p. 20).

In Western philosophy Derrida identifies the transcendental signifier with the concept of *Logos*, describing Western civilization as being characterized by "logocentrism" (Derrida, 1976, p. 3). Logocentrism for Derrida is "nothing but the most original and powerful ethnocentrism" (1976, p.3). It represents "the tendency to subordinate the full material reality

of discourse and language to λόγος<sup>12</sup> in the sense of an ideal “logical” meaning-structure” (Backman, 2012, p. 69-70). Now that some of the terms used by Derrida have been outlined it is possible to understand his critique of Heidegger at a more general level.

Derrida’s central argument is that Heidegger’s deconstruction is done with the intent of uncovering the fundamental ontology of Being that has been covered over by Western metaphysics. Heidegger is still committed to the idea that there is a fundamental truth of Being to be uncovered (Hoy, 1979, p. 224). Derrida on the other hand does not make the assumption that there is truth to be found, or perhaps more accurately, that truth requires a transcendental signifier such as the logos. According to Derrida no such signified exists, that is, “all discursive meaning is contaminated with a signifying element, a reference to something else” (Backman, 2012, p. 71). What this means is that meaning itself becomes essentially contingent at all times. As Derrida writes, “there has to be a transcendental signified for the difference between signifier and signified to be somewhere absolute and irreducible” (1976, p. 20). Without the transcendental signifier, without logos, distinctions and differences collapse in on themselves and their socially constructed nature is revealed. Language becomes an “infinite referral of signifier to signifier” (Derrida, 1978, p. 29). This idea was famously expressed in Derrida’s 1967 essay *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*, “the absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification *ad infinitum*” (1993, p. 224).

### The Postmodern Worldview:

What should be clear at this point is that the postmodern project stems from a lack of faith in the competence of reason to provide humanity with all the information it requires to orient itself in the world. The postmodern scholars attempt to go beyond what can be known by the human intellect. This passage of Kant’s sums the point up nicely;

Human reason, in one sphere of its cognition, is called upon to consider questions, which it cannot decline, as they are presented by its own nature, but which it cannot answer, as they transcend every faculty of the mind (Kant, 2000, p. 1).

It is worth taking a moment to reemphasize a point made at the beginning of this section. In describing the proclivity of the continental tradition to focus on the irrational and contradictory aspects of existence it should not be assumed that the opposition between

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<sup>12</sup> Backman here uses the Greek spelling of Logos.

enlightenment and counter-enlightenment thinkers is simply a battle between the valiant defenders of reason and science and the irrational, socially conservative, radical (particularly in Nietzsche's case) defenders of power, faith and phenomenological experience. The philosophers of the continental tradition were engaging in extremely deep questions about the limits of rationality and what may lie beyond it. These questions continue to occupy the human mind, and in our failure to provide satisfactory answers to them, continue to plague humanity's lived experience as well. The rational order described by the enlightenment philosophers, as it drifted further and further away from its moorings in Judaeo-Christian theology has become less able to provide humanity with answers to questions concerning its nature and moral destiny. The continental philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century take this issue seriously, and to deny that their ideas still have relevance today is to fail to adequately conceptualize the problem of theorizing the nature of a developed society.

The table below provides a distillation of postmodernism's fundamental assumptions as extrapolated from the previous discussion.

Assumptions of Postmodernism	
<p>1. Reason (enlightenment) is impotent to know reality as it exists as such.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Reality, therefore, must be of a different quality to the rational quality of the human mind</li> <li>b. This quality, by definition, can include contradiction, conflict and other irrational aspects</li> </ul>	<p>2. Whatever reality is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. God's divine order of things</li> <li>b. the Spirit of God himself</li> <li>c. an immutable will-to-power</li> <li>d. primordial disclosed Being; or</li> <li>e. something completely indeterminable altogether</li> </ul> <p>it includes contradiction, conflict and irrationality.</p>
<p>3. Not being able to rely on rationality to orient themselves in the world, individuals must rely on one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Natural passions</li> </ul>	<p>4. As reality and the forces which move it are beyond both the understanding and the independent initiation of individuals, social hierarchies<sup>13</sup>, which provide content to individual</p>

<sup>13</sup> I use the term 'social hierarchy' here to encompass the broadest possible range of extant or desired social and political organizations. It could refer to an absolute dictatorship, it could represent a communist utopia, or it could represent a return to, or worship of, a pre-modern cultural hierarchy.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. Faith in God</li> <li>c. Cultural milieu</li> <li>d. Instincts</li> <li>e. Deep feelings</li> </ul>	<p>identities as well as a structure through which individuals can relate to one another, are of greater importance than any one individual.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Social hierarchies, and those individuals who rise up to lead them, therefore act in the interest of all, even if this conflicts with the interests of some.</li> </ul>
<p>5. Individuals should voluntarily submit themselves to the will of the social hierarchy and perform the duties required of them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. In this way individuals rely on the social hierarchy both for their identity and for their proper orientation in the world.</li> </ul>	<p>6. Conflict and suffering may occur, but as long as individuals act in accordance with the will of the social hierarchy and with their:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Natural passions</li> <li>b. Instincts</li> <li>c. Deep feelings</li> </ul> <p>They will have lived a proper life.</p>
<p>7. The contradictory, conflictual and irrational quality to reality means that social hierarchies are deeply contingent and subject to change.</p>	<p>8. Because social hierarchies are contingent, they are fundamentally malleable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Because individuals fundamentally depend on social hierarchies for their identity and orientation in the world, individuals are also fundamentally malleable.</li> </ul>
<p>9. Aside from acts of pure force, language is the fundamental means by which contradictory, conflictual and irrational reality is mediated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Language, having no transcendent signifier as an ultimate reference for meaning, is essentially contingent.</li> <li>b. Meaning, and therefore truth, is socially constructed.</li> </ul>	

## Postmodern Development:

Development viewed through a postmodern lens has been covered quite comprehensively already in Chapter 2. The post-development school presents a very clear account of the implications of postmodern philosophy for the study and practice of international development. What this section will focus on then is making clear exactly how the fundamental assumptions of postmodernism lead to the post-development approach to international development. Also covered will be the role of the state. Although the role of state power is not a central focus in much post-development theory, it will be argued that post-development's roots in Rousseau and Hegel make it an inevitable part of the post-development project.

Where this section and the Post-Development Theory section from Chapter Two meet is at the intersection between Michel Foucault and the likes of Arturo Escobar, and between Jacques Derrida and the likes of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. The connection between these writers is fairly explicit.

Escobar (1995) writes about the “discourse and strategy” of development (p. 5). Alvares (1992) equates knowledge with power (p. 256). And Crush (1995) suggests development is “fundamentally about mapping and making, about the spatial reach of power and the control and management of other peoples, territories, environments, and places (p. 6-7). These works use language associated with Foucault's discourse theory which asserts that “there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (Foucault, 1978b, p. 27). As is true for Foucault, these post-development theorists view the world as consisting of different groups who have their own socially constructed set of discourses which provide them with the system of meaning they use to orient themselves in the world. Historically, more powerful groups have imposed their systems of meaning on weaker groups, and this is what has created the conditions of the present. The focus on power in post-development literature has its roots in Foucault, who, in turn, was influenced by Nietzsche and his immutable will-to-power.

Ideas which can be traced to the philosophy of Derrida are also easily identified in the post-development literature, particularly in what Ziai (2004) calls “Sceptical Post-Development”.

As will be recalled, sceptical post-development has its roots in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and their concept of “Radical Democracy”. Laclau is of particular importance to the post-development school because of his arguments concerning the merits of a populist politics.

Laclau was also influential for bringing the ontic/ontological distinction into post-development thinking (Laclau in Hansen & Sonnichsen, 2014, p. 261). The ontic/ontological distinction should be recalled from the discussion of Heidegger and his distinction between ontic being and ontological Being. Heidegger’s search for a fundamental ontology of Being was rejected by Derrida and replaced by the “infinite referral of signifier to signifier” (Derrida, 1978, p. 29), that is, the essential contingency of all meaning and claims to truth. Laclau follows Derrida in this way. Laclau asserts that “the area of undecidability” (Laclau in Hansen & Sonnichsen, 2014, p. 261-262), for him, is ontologically decisive. Showing a clear Derridian lineage in their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe describe their concept of radical democracy as “a form of politics which is founded not upon dogmatic postulation of any ‘essence of the social’, but, on the contrary, on affirmation of the contingency and ambiguity of every ‘essence’” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. 176-177).

A more difficult task is to understand the relationship between philosophers like Rousseau and Hegel and the post-development school. It appears difficult to apply the theological aspects of their work to a more modern, secular context. It will be argued here however, that both these scholars provide important assumptions to the post-development school that are built into their theories.

As was mentioned in the discussion of Foucault, a natural consequence of the group-centric and anti-rational epistemology of the counter-enlightenment tradition is that each group has its own socially constructed set of discourses which provides the social hierarchy they use to order their affairs and orient themselves in the world. In this formulation, truth is socially constructed through discourse. So too for Derrida, truth is never final or absolute. Particular constellations of meaning arise, but they are always essentially contingent and unstable. The connection between Rousseau and Hegel and the post-development school comes by way of this recognition of the anti-rational and group-centric nature of truth.

Truth becoming a group-centric construction is the result of the postmodern rejection of the competence of reason. Reason is a capacity of the individual and so if it is deemed to occupy a special place in regard to humanity's relationship to truth and progress, then ethical individualism will be the result. For Rousseau, reason is the cause of inequality and moral degradation in society (Rousseau, 2008, p. 15-16). It is not the proper means by which humans should orient themselves in the world. What are more important in this regard are "the passions" (Rousseau, 2008, p. 8). Of foremost importance is the passion that drives humanity to a faith in God as it is faith in God that allows humanity to tolerate the "continual deprivations which good laws impose" (Rousseau, 2002, p. 182). Good laws are those laws that which are enacted for the benefit of the "general will". For Rousseau, "each of us puts in common his person and all his power under the supreme direction of the general will; and in return each member becomes an indivisible part of the whole" (Rousseau, 2002, p. 164). The collective is the morally important unit, and so society should be based on the general will. Watts' description of populism here comes to mind, "a particular sort of politics in which an effort is made to manufacture a collective national-popular will" (1995, p. 58). Politics is not about acting according to truth and reason, it is about the health of the social organism defined by reference to the general will.

In a similar vein, Hegel also has an organicist view of society. As will be recalled, Hegel's understood reality to be the progressive playing out of God's divine will. Human beings are the incomplete and imperfect vessels through which this plan is enacted and are not therefore independent initiators of their own volitional acts. Individuals are reliant on their social hierarchy for their orientation in the world, and for their role in bringing about God's will, so the social hierarchy is of more importance than the individual. For Hegel, the state is "the Divine Idea as it exists on Earth" (Hegel, 2000, p. 54). Individuals should, therefore, devote themselves to their culture and to their state. As Hegel writes:

It is the absolute interest of Reason that this moral Whole should exist; and herein lies the justification and merit of heroes who have founded states – however rude these may have been (Hegel, 1956, p. 39).

It should be remembered that the "Reason" Hegel cites in the above passage differs markedly from enlightenment reason with its roots in Plato and Aristotle's laws of non-contradiction. Contradiction and conflict form an important part of Hegel's understanding of progress and the unfolding of history (Maybee, 2016, Sec. 4; Hicks, 2012, p. 50). It is only the whole

which is true in any meaningful sense and so the fact that contradictions and conflict arise is but a natural part of the unfolding of God's divine will on earth. This theme of the importance of contradiction and conflict as a means to progress is echoed in Laclau and Mouffe (2014) when they write about the "constitutive character of social division and antagonism" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. 176-177). The theological component has been stripped away owing to their commitment to Derrida's account of the infinite interplay of signification and the essential contingency of meaning, but the idea that "social division and antagonism" play a constitutive role in human affairs is a clear echo of Hegel's idea of contradictory Reason. This connection is made by way of another important scholar who has not been included in this chapter but was briefly mentioned in Chapter One, Karl Marx. Laclau and Mouffe have roots in Marxist philosophy (see Laclau & Mouffe, 1987), and Marx himself is known for secularizing and materializing Hegel's philosophy in his book *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. Derrida too has expressed an affinity for Marxist thought (see Hicks, 2012, p. 186) and so Laclau and Mouffe's connection to Derrida is also able to be viewed through this shared intellectual lineage.

The link between post-development thought and the centrality of state power in the philosophy of Rousseau and Hegel is slightly more tenuous and less well-developed in the literature. To end this section a few preliminary thoughts regarding this connection will be offered.

In the table of postmodern assumptions, it was identified that:

1. The contradictory, conflictual and irrational quality to reality means that social hierarchies are deeply contingent and subject to change.
2. Because social hierarchies are contingent, they are fundamentally malleable.
  - a. Because individuals fundamentally depend on social hierarchies for their identity and orientation in the world, individuals are also fundamentally malleable.

This thesis proposes that it is the essential contingency of truth and knowledge, and the assumed malleability of social orders and human behaviour that leads to a reliance on and willingness to use state power as a tool in the pursuit of development. If social orders and human behaviour are fundamentally malleable then this means they can be shaped according to a priori principles of social organization. This is why, as Tucker (2017) notes, Hegelian philosophy has historically been co-opted by both left and right political movements (p. 124).

And it is also why, as may be recalled from Part 1 of this chapter, John Dewey breaks away from classical liberal philosophical tenets in order to permit a larger role for the state in managing human affairs. The state becomes the means by which a priori normative frameworks can be imposed on the fundamentally malleable social world. This is true whether it is in the form of the right-nationalism or religious fundamentalism which Brass (2015) warns us about, the emancipatory potential of radical democracy championed by Laclau and Mouffe (2014) and Ziai (2004), or John Dewey's science and reason-based liberalism.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Conclusion:

This thesis has attempted to provide a philosophical and epistemological perspective to the study of international development. It began by describing the origins of international development discourse in the aftermath of WW2. It was identified that at its origin, international development was provided its normative content by the respective ideological blocs of the liberal capitalist West and the communist Soviet Union. International development discourse was then traced from its origins in the post-war period right up until the 21<sup>st</sup> century showing how the discourse has revolved around certain key tensions such as universal vs particular solutions and state vs market solutions. In the late 1980s the emergence of a post-development discourse in development studies emerged. This discourse called into question the whole edifice of Western liberal development strategy and it was argued that the liberal vision for international development has never fully recovered. This loss of faith in the liberal development project has accompanied the rise of significant non-Western state actors (e.g. China, India, Russia and Brazil) as well as an emergence of a number of national-popular movements worldwide. The argument made in this thesis was that this situation is usefully understood at the level of underlying epistemological assumptions.

Two distinct intellectual strains were chosen for analysis, liberalism and postmodernism. A number of philosophers from each strain were discussed and at the end of each section a table of fundamental assumptions was produced to distil the ideas of each school into a more compact format. At the end of each analysis a section was included which identified more precisely the relationship between development theories and the epistemological assumptions upon which they are based.

It was suggested that classical liberal philosophy finds its most clear expression in development thought in modernization theory. Individual rational action was asserted as the fundamental driving force of development and social structures as well as economic relations all reflected this. However due to the perceived failure of the modernization approach to development as well as its vulnerability to critiques coming from the post-development school, liberal theories of development have been reformulated over time. In this regard communitarian critiques have been influential with their commentary on the nature of the self, and within development thought scholars such as Dudley Seers and Amartya Sen have expanded the concept of freedom well beyond its traditional articulation in classical liberal



philosophy. This has drawn focus to the inevitable evaluative dimension of international development as well as put pressure on the classical liberal argument for a limited government. As the concept of freedom has expanded, so too has the mandate and scope for state intervention and social planning.

The postmodern influence on international development discourse was most clearly seen in the connection between Michel Foucault and post-development's discourse analysis scholars such as Arturo Escobar, as well as between Jacques Derrida and the sceptical post-development theorists influenced by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

Most interesting in the analysis the postmodern contribution to development thought was the influence of the earlier philosophers such as Jean Jacques Rousseau and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Their rejection of enlightenment reason as the proper means of orienting human behaviour in the world as well as their identification of truth with the general-will (for Rousseau) and the Divine will (for Hegel) meant that the most important moral unit was the collective and not the individual. Developed more thoroughly by Hegel, this led to a description of progress in which society progressed via the overcoming of contradictions and conflict. This theme was identified as being present in Laclau and Mouffe's concept of radical democracy and in the sceptical strain of post-development literature.

At the end of this discussion of postmodern development a few preliminary thoughts were offered to explain why the state has once again become a central focus in international development discourse. The central idea presented was that from a postmodern perspective social orders and human behaviour is fundamentally malleable. This means that human affairs can be shaped according to a priori principles. It was noted that Hegelian philosophy has been associated with both left and right wing political manifestations and that many of the scholars with a Hegelian philosophical lineage, including Jacques Derrida, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have an affinity with Marxist thought.

This thesis has articulated the philosophical assumptions of two distinct intellectual strains, liberalism and postmodernism, and attempted to show how a philosophical approach can be useful for understanding the nature of disagreements within international development discourse. The central lesson that should be taken from this analysis is that if at times it appears as though scholars, politicians, NGOs, development practitioners and individuals themselves are talking about different worlds, that may be because, epistemologically, they

are. The nature of many disagreements in international development discourse exist not at the level of practice and detail, but at the level of epistemological starting points. Bridging this gap to allow conversations to happen across epistemological divides will not be an easy task, but it is an important one. Liberal scholars will be left with the mammoth task of theorizing the limits of reason and individual agency in regard to solving social problems; and postmodern scholars will need to face the challenge of theorizing a constructive side to development in a world in which everything can be deconstructed.

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